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CATHOLIC SERMONS FOR CHILDREN.

BY THE REV. J. E. VERNON, M.A.,
Vicar of Bicknoller, Taunton.

No. I.



OXFORD:
A. R. MOWBRAY & Co.
LONDON:
SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, & Co.

“FORBID THEM NOT.”

“Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not ; for of such is the Kingdom of God.”—S. Mark x. 14.

THESE little children wanted very much to come to Jesus. I wonder whether you are like them. They had some grown-up people trying to keep them away ; but Jesus said, You must not keep them away, let them come ; they are just the ones who ought to come. Now-a-days I am afraid many little children want to keep away from Jesus, although some grown-up people try to bring them near to Him.

I want to bring you nearer to Jesus to-day and always, children. I hope you will not try to get away from Him.

Never let any little one among you think, “I am too young ; too little yet,

to come near to Jesus. I must wait till I am older and bigger. Jesus attends to grown-up people, He cannot attend to such little folk as I."

Mark what Jesus says,—He says as plainly as possible, that little children are just the very ones who should come near to him. He says, "Of such is the Kingdom of God." When did He ever say as much of older people?

Now, dear children, perhaps, if you are attending to me, as I hope you are, perhaps you are thinking that you cannot come near to Jesus like those little children of whom S. Mark speaks. Jesus was on earth then, He is in Heaven now. How can you come at all near Him till you die?

Children, you *have* been near to Jesus, you have been held in His arms, you have been blessed by Him, you have been washed clean from sin in His Precious Blood. This was

when you were christened or baptized. In the Font what looked like water really was Blood, the Blood of Jesus ; you seemed to be touched and held in the arms of an earthly priest, you really were held in the arms of Jesus, just as truly and really as the children of whom S. Mark tells us.

Don't think it too hard to believe all this, dear children ; you and I, who belong to the Church of Jesus, must "walk by Faith, not by sight," we must believe something more trustworthy than our eyes, and that is, God's Word.

Now I will say no more about that time when you were brought to Jesus in Holy Baptism ; because I want to speak to you about the way by which you can still very often come close to Jesus and see Him and speak to Him. You can do this whenever there is Holy Communion. Whenever there is Holy Communion, Jesus Him-

self is present on the Altar just as really as He was present on earth when the little children were brought to Him. You can only *see* a little bread and wine; but that bread and wine really *is* the Body and Blood of Jesus. So when you see the Bread and Wine, you see Jesus, and can speak to Him. Let me try to make this a little plainer. Suppose you saw your father working in the field, he might be a good way off, and his face turned away, so that you could not really see any part of your father, but only his clothes. Still if any one asked you, you would say, "I see father;" because you would know that he was in those clothes which alone your eye could see. And so in the Holy Communion, although you could only see Bread and Wine, you would know your Lord is there, because of your faith in His Word.

Now, dear children, plainly, if my

text means anything, it means that wherever Jesus really is, *there* little children may come, and no one is to stop them on peril of disobedience to the Lord. So, as Jesus is really present, true God and true Man, in the Blessed Sacrament, little children who love Him and want to come to Him, may come there just as much as grown-up people. Only, you know, dear children, that you cannot *receive* the Body and Blood of Jesus in that Sacrament until you are confirmed. Still it does not follow that it is *no use* for you to stay during the Holy Service. *Jesus* is there. He does not *only* come to give Himself to be the *Food* of His *Sheep* ; but He comes also to be the *Shepherd* of His *Lambs*, to gather them in His arms, to carry them in His bosom. Jesus is there. Only He hides His Glory, or else no one could dare to look on Him. As when on earth He hid His Godhead

under the form of flesh and blood, so now in the Holy Communion, He hides both His Godhead and Manhood under the form of Bread and Wine.

Well then, dear children, do I mean that I really want *you* to come to God's House when in the quiet of the early morning the Sacrament of Holy Communion is being celebrated? Do I really wish *you* to stay the whole service to the end? Yes, I do; because I want you, young as you are, to learn to seek Jesus in His Blessed Sacrament, to worship Jesus in His Holy Sacrament, to love Jesus in His Holy Sacrament, to *see* Jesus, by faith, in His Holy Sacrament, and to look upon Jesus as your truest, dearest Friend, to Whom you can come whenever He is present on the Altar to ask Him for what you want, and to help you to be good. I want you to learn to look forward to the time when you shall be

old enough and taught enough, to be confirmed by the Bishop. I want you to look forward to this time as a most happy and most blessed time, because you will then be strengthened by the Holy Ghost, and able to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus, as the Food of your souls. I want you to get so *accustomed* to the Presence of Jesus that you may learn to love that Presence and not fear It; that you may learn to hunger and thirst after Him, to long for the time when you shall not only be allowed to go to Jesus and pray to Him in His Blessed Sacrament; but have Him come to you to dwell *in* you and you in Him.

I once read a story of two little children, a girl and a boy, who were so fond of seeking Jesus in His Blessed Sacrament that they were called the "children of the Sacrament." I wish you, dear children, would all gain this

name ; then, instead of hearing so much quarrelling in the streets, and constant cries of "I'll tell mother" from angry little lips, perhaps I should see little girls and boys who had forgotten themselves and been unkind to others, asking them to make it up and saying, "I am sorry I have been unkind, and I will tell Jesus next Sunday and ask Him to forgive me and help me to be kind." And perhaps, some of you might comfort your parents and neighbours when they are ill or unhappy, by telling them that you would ask Jesus next time you go to Him, to make them well or to give them strength to bear the trial. I think that parent's heart would be very hard which would not be touched and comforted by the thought of his or her little one's simple prayers of childlike faith being offered before Jesus at His Holy Altar.

And surely, dear children, He Who heard and gladly accepted the Hosannas of little Jewish children crying in the Temple, will hear and answer the prayers of Christian children at His Altars. He Who said, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me and forbid them not," meant what He said, and will not frown on any Christian child coming to seek His blessings in the Holy Sacrament.

Surely, little children, who believe His words and act upon them, will be better and purer and gentler and truer for each visit they pay to Him in the Blessed Sacrament. Surely, little children who are not too young to sin, not too young to die, not too young to go to Heaven, are not too young to be present with Jesus in His courts below.

THE END.

OXFORD :

PRINTED BY A. R. MOWBRAY AND CO.

1871.



CATHOLIC SERMONS FOR CHILDREN.

BY THE REV. J. E. VERNON, M.A.,
Vicar of Bicknoller, Taunton.

NO. II.
THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM.

OXFORD:
A. R. MOWBRAY & Co.
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THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM.

“And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof.”—Zechariah viii. 5.

WHAT a wonderful book the Bible is ! It is not only a book about grown-up people, but it has a great deal about little children too. There you may read about Josiah, the child-king, about David, the ruddy-faced shepherd boy, about Samuel, the child of prayer, about Timothy, the Bible-loving boy, and about many other good children, but, above all, about the holy child Jesus. There you may read about naughty children, who mocked Elisha, and good children, who sang Hosanna to Jesus in the Temple. There you may read about children at work, and, yes, you may even read about children at play. Look at the text. Perhaps you did not know that there was such a text in the Bible. Perhaps you never thought that God cared about the play of boys and girls like you. And yet, you see He cares enough about it to cause His prophet Zechariah to write

something in His book about the sports of children.

My dear children, I hope you will never fall into the mistake of supposing that religion is only for grown-up people. I hope you will never think that our Father in Heaven wants to put a stop to little children's merry laughter and happy play and fun. Never be deceived with the notion that piety consists in pulling a long face, looking sour and shocked at innocent mirth, and sitting all day poring over a Bible with grim eyes which never seem to light up with joy at the good tidings which it contains. Religion is meant to make children enjoy their play more instead of stopping it ; to make their hearts lighter instead of sadder. And as for grown-up people, why it is meant to make them like children ; to make them happy like children, free from anxiety as children, enjoy like children innocent play at proper times.

I know one who once was a little boy, (but that is some sixty years ago now) who was brought up in Scotland. One Sunday, as he was walking in a sort of

cloister attached to the school, he so far forgot himself as to whistle a tune ; I think it was a hymn tune, but I am not sure. The master darted out of a door upon him, and nearly twisted his ear off for "breaking the Sabbath." I am afraid that well-meaning but mistaken man's notion of religion was a very grim one, and his mode of instilling it into the youthful mind not happy.

Sunday, the day of the Resurrection of Jesus, was never meant to be a dull, gloomy day. It should be a day of refreshment for soul and body from worldly toils and cares. "This is the day which the Lord hath made, let us rejoice and be glad in it." It is always Sunday in Heaven, so children's Sundays on earth should not be such as to make them think that Heaven is anything but a bright, happy place. And oh ! what a bright, happy place it is ! There the hoary head will be crowned with glory, the beauty of old age without its many infirmities. There will be young men and maidens, manhood in its strength, and womanhood in its full

bloom. There will be little children too. Oh, yes, surely without them Heaven would not seem perfect. "The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof."

These words were first spoken of Jerusalem on earth. You know Jerusalem was the chief city of the Jews, God's chosen people. They had sinned against God so often that at last He caused their city to be destroyed, and themselves to be carried away captive to Babylon. But after many years God brought them back again, and told them that they might build it up once more. He sent His prophet Zechariah to encourage them in the work with many blessed promises. Among others, He assured them that "There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof." But these promises were not meant only for the earthly Jerusalem. They were fulfilled in its restoration. But they will be far more perfectly fulfilled

in the Heavenly Jerusalem, the City of God.

Now, we notice first, that it is called a city. But it will not be like any earthly city. Here we, too, often see boys and girls quarrelling, and cheating, and fighting, and using naughty words. And, then, our earthly cities are mostly dirty and smoky, and full of poverty, and misery, and sin. But in this city it will be very different. We are told (Rev. xxi.) "The street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass." "The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the Light thereof." "There shall be no night there." And there will be green trees, and streams of pure water, and birds with feathers of gold and silver. The eye will never be tired of seeing new and wonderful sights, nor the ear of hearing sweet music, nor the mouth of tasting angels' food, nor the feet of running in the way of God's commandments, nor the hands of clapping together for very joy, and playing on

harps and all kinds of musical instruments. There will be lessons to learn, but they will be such as little children will love to be taught. There will be no scoldings, and punishments, and tears, for they will not be needed. There will be work to be done, but such as no one will grow weary of. There will be games for little children to play at, but they will never end in a quarrel, or be spoiled by unkindness. Boys and girls will play in the streets, without any fear of being run over, or falling down and hurting themselves.

And this beautiful City is your future home. You were made inheritors of it in your Baptism, when you were christened. You shall play in its golden streets, you shall go in and out of its gates of pearl, you shall drink of its crystal fountains, and eat of its pleasant fruits. But if this is to be so, you must learn its language now, you must make your playtime here a practice for playing there, you must put on now the good manners of its well-behaved children.

And the language of that City is

truth. So you must always speak the truth even in play, you must never deceive any one even in jest. No liars will be admitted there. Again, its language is prayer. So you must learn now how to ask God for everthing you want, that you may know how to ask Him there. For you must not think that you will have done with prayer in Heaven. God will deny his little boys and girls nothing there, but He will always expect His creatures to ask Him for His good gifts. Then, another part of its language is thanksgiving. God will always expect to be thanked for His blessings. So you must not forget to learn to thank Him now for your "creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life, but above all for His inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ." Also, a great part of the language of that City will be praise. So you must learn now to praise God with all your heart. Praise is not the same as thanksgiving. You thank a person for what he gives you or does for you. You praise those who have

done anything worthy of praise. Good children are praised, good men and women are praised, for being good. And God, Who is goodness itself, is above all to be praised because He is so great and good. Therefore "young men and maidens, old men and children, praise the Name of the Lord." Let everything that hath breath, praise the Lord."

Then, when you are going to play, think of the boys and girls playing in the streets of the City of God. Try to play as you would play then. Don't cheat—don't quarrel—be kind to your playmates—give up to them. Play at games which they want to play at, even if you would rather play at something else. Be willing to lend others your toys. Do not be angry if you are beaten at play—let your play be play, not earnest. Do not be boastful if you win. Never use ill-natured nicknames, nor make sport of the awkwardness of others. Above all do not make game of any whom God has afflicted with lameness or weak intellect or any other defect. Do not tease others

about the colour of their hair or their ugliness, or because their parents are not so rich as yours. God made them what they are, and so be afraid of mocking God's handiwork. Remember the children who mocked Elisha for his bald head.

If you will observe these plain rules, dear children, your play will be happy and innocent, and such as God loves to see. You will be making your play-hours a preparation for Heaven, just as much as your praying times. You will be growing more and more fit for the society of those boys and girls of whom the text speaks.

One word more about your play. Never play when you ought to be doing something else. If your play is to be innocent and heavenly, it must be kept for the proper times and places. And so you must never play in Church or in the churchyard. You must not play in lesson time, nor in bed when you ought to be going to sleep. And when you are saying your prayers in your own little room, or at family prayer, do not be thinking of your

play. Play, which is innocent at proper times, is sin at wrong times and in wrong places.

So now you see that Religion does not tell you not to play, but only how to play, when to play, and where to play. It teaches you, in short, how your play may help you to Heaven, instead of hindering you. And if only little boys and girls would play in this world of ours, as little girls and boys play in those golden streets, the dulllest streets would seem golden even now, and older people looking on, would long and pray to be converted and become as little children, that they might enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

May you, then, so play, dear little friends, that your merry faces may be seen among those that play in God's own City, and may I be there to see!

THE END.



CATHOLIC SERMONS FOR CHILDREN.

BY THE REV. J. E. VERNON, M.A.,
Vicar of Bicknoller, Taunton.

NO. III.
DANGERS GHOSTLY AND BODILY.

OXFORD:
A. R. MOWBRAY & Co.
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DANGERS GHOSTLY AND BODILY.

“And was with the wild beasts.”

S. Mark i. 13.

WITH the wild beasts ! Who was this ? You can tell me, little children, can you not ? Yes, it was Jesus. You know what wild beasts are. You have seen them at the Zoological Gardens, or at some wild beast show. And I daresay you were very frightened indeed when you first saw them, before you felt quite sure that they could not get at you to hurt you. But to be all alone, in the dark, in a great wilderness, with wild beasts, not in cages, but *prowling about at liberty*, this would be terrible, would it not ? And yet, this is what Jesus braved for you, not for one night only,

but forty days and forty nights. He had no house to go into and shut the door, no food to strengthen Him, no earthly companion to share His danger. Was He frightened? No. Why not? Because He was God? No, dear children, that is not the reason. It is quite true that He was and is God, and as God He could not be frightened; but it is equally true that He was and is Man, and as man He could be frightened, and hurt, and killed. No, the reason why He was not frightened was because He was good. All good people are brave, for they trust in God to take care of them. Bad people are cowards, for they know that they have forfeited their right to look for God's protection. "The wicked flee when no man pursueth, but the righteous is bold as a lion." Jesus knew He could trust His Father to take care of Him. And God did take care of Him. We read

directly after my text, "and the angels ministered unto Him." That was why He was safe. The angels kept the wild beasts from hurting Him, so that He was safer from them than if they had been shut in the strongest cages. Alone, in the wilderness, night after night, with wild beasts, and yet not frightened and not hurt! After this, children, who of you will be afraid to be left in the dark by yourself, not in a wilderness, but in a comfortable bed, not with wild beasts, but among friends?

Now I know that even little children can think and reason too, as sharply as many grown-up people; and I can fancy I see some little timid one's thoughts shaping themselves into this objection—"Yes, but Jesus was God's son; angels would not take care of me like that." Would not they, little friend? Think again. Can you tell me the name of that man who was put into a den among

fierce lions and came out unhurt? Yes, you remember now how Daniel told the king, "My God hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me." So you see, the same God took care of Daniel Who took care of His own Son, and by the same means—by means of angels. And do not angels take care of little children as well as of grown-up persons? Oh, yes; for Jesus told the people to take heed that they did not despise one of the little ones, for that their angels do always behold the face of His Father in heaven. *Their* angels! the angels of the little ones! So *you*, however little and however poor, have a bright angel of your own, just as much your very own as your dear mother and father, and even better able to guard you from harm.

Now, when you are alone, when you are in the dark, when you have fright-

ening dreams, think of the angels,—*your* angel,—and be brave. You cannot see the angels, any more than you can see the wind, but they are there, watching over you for all that. They are spirits, and you are safer in their keeping than if the Queen were to send a number of her bravest soldiers to watch round your bed.

One word more about the wild beasts. You know there are no wild beasts in England, except those you see shut up in cages ; at least, not of that sort. But there are wild beasts around you which you cannot see, because they are spirits like the angels, only not good spirits like them, but bad spirits. One is called Sloth, or Laziness, another Greediness, another Naughty Temper, another Pride, another Envy, another Unchastity, another Covetousness, or Stinginess, another Lying, another Slyness ; but there are too many to name. They

are very ugly, and I hope they will never be seen in you. For this is the only way these evil beasts can be seen, when people make cages of their hearts for them to live in. If you pray to the Father of Jesus for Jesus' sake, He will send His angels to stop the mouths of these beasts, so that they shall not hurt you. And you must pray, too, to your Father in heaven to fill your hearts with the love of Jesus, and with all virtues, so that there shall be no room for bad spirits to get in. And mind, this is very important, because if your heart is empty, those wild beasts will be sure to enter in and dwell there ; and then you would be, oh ! in so sad a sense, "with the wild beasts."

But perhaps one or more of them *have* got in already ! This is sad ; but why should he stay there ? Why not drive him out ? You have got two hands to push him out with,—“prayer,”

and “trying.” If you have not got rid of him yet, perhaps it is because you have only tried with one hand. Now take two. “Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

Oh! little ones of Jesus, ask Him to help you to conquer some old fault, that His loving eye may rest upon one little one who for love of Him has overcome the wicked one by the help of His dear grace. And so may you always overcome, little children, and be kept by Him, that that evil beast may not hurt you, until you reach that happy land of which it is written, “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed, their young ones shall lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child

shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

May little children love the Lord ?

May little children often pray ?
And will God hear the very words
That little children say ?

Oh, yes ! if truth be in the prayer,
And children wish the words they say,
Then God will surely bless them there,
And love them every day.

'Tis God Who loves us every day,
He makes the glorious sun to shine,
But His pure Spirit is a light
Whose power is all divine.

He teaches children heavenly Love,
He makes them truthful, sweet, and
kind,
He leads their hearts to heaven above,
And fills with peace their mind.

As on their little beds they lie,
They think of heaven and sweetly say,
My Saviour! hear me when I cry,
And make me good to-day.

Thro' all the day be near me still,
My heavenly Father think on me,
Help me to do Thy holy will,
And draw my soul to Thee.



OXFORD :

PRINTED BY A. R. MOWBRAY AND CO.

1871.



CATHOLIC SERMONS FOR CHILDREN.

BY THE REV. J. E. VERNON, M.A.,

Vicar of Bicknoller, Taunton.

NO. IV.
THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

OXFORD:
A. R. MOWBRAY & Co.
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THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

“He shall feed His flock like a shepherd; He shall gather the lambs with His arm and carry them in His bosom.”—Isaiah xl. 11.

I WILL begin by telling you a little story. I daresay you have often heard it before. It is in the Bible. See whether, when I have told it to you, you can find where. Well then, once upon a time, there was a man riding in his chariot across a desert. His skin was black, not fair like yours. You know what a negro is? well, he was a negro, an African. He was not a slave. No, he was a very rich man, and had charge of all the treasure of a

famous Queen, called Candace, and she was black too. Fancy a black Queen! Now this black man was reading his Bible, as he sat in his chariot. He was reading the very same book of the Bible as that from which my text is taken, the Prophet Isaiah. But not the same chapter, for he was reading the 53rd chapter. But it was about sheep and lambs, or rather a sheep and a lamb. And while he was trying to make out what it meant, and whether Isaiah spoke of himself or of some one else, a clergyman came up to him, and asked him if he understood what he was reading. The black man told him that he could not. He was very glad to see the clergyman, because he thought that he would be able to ex-

plain it all to him, and so he asked him to come and sit with him in his chariot. Philip, for that was the clergyman's name, accepted his offer, and when he saw what he was reading, he began at the same Scripture and preached to him Jesus. Now, what that clergyman did then, I want to do now. Sometimes it is necessary for clergymen to preach to grown up people and little children about their faults, what they ought to do, and what not to do. But this will be of little use, unless they also tell them often about Jesus. It is Jesus, then, of Whom Isaiah says in the text, that, "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd; He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom."

The "flock" of Jesus is His people. The fold is His Church ; some of the flock are within the fold, some are wandering away from it, "lost sheep," "gone astray." The "lambs" are "little children." By the "arm" of Jesus are meant His ministers, Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, on earth ; and His angels in Heaven. The "bosom" of Jesus is Paradise. Jesus is the Chief "Shepherd," all that is done for the good of the flock and of the lambs is done by Jesus. Jesus *laid down his life* for the flock, died in their defence, that they might be saved from the power of the enemy, that roaring lion, Satan. Jesus *feeds* the flock. He employs ministers as under-shepherds to lead them "beside the still waters" of Baptism, to

feed them with the precious food of His Word, and the spiritual food of His Body and Blood in the Holy Communion, to wash them clean from the stains of sin by Absolution, to raise them up when they are fallen into sin and keep them on the right way when they are in doubt, to visit and tend them when they are sick, to defend them against false doctrine. But it is really Jesus Who baptizes (S John iv. 1, 2), Jesus Who preaches, Jesus Who gives Himself the Bread of Life in the Holy Communion, Jesus Who forgives, Jesus Who raises the fallen, guides the erring, visits the sick, opposes false teaching by shewing the Truth, for He is the Truth. What clergymen do and teach according to the will of Jesus

and in His Name, He does Himself by them. Just in the same way, what clergymen and other Christian people do to the hungry, the poor, the sick, the stranger, Jesus counts as done to Himself. So when you, dear children, do a kind act or speak a kind word to the poor and suffering, as I hope you often do, you are really doing it to Jesus. Oh what a treasure of kind acts and words "ministering children" may thus lay up for themselves in Heaven! You have heard of "lamb's wool"? Perhaps some of the clothes you now have on are made of it. Well, you know that wool comes from the fleece, which the shepherd gets from the lambs by shearing. Now I think these little acts of kindness and love which little

children may do may be called the fleece, the lamb's wool, which they willingly yield to the Good Shepherd, and He will wash it in His precious Blood and make it pure bright clothing in which the little lambs may be dressed, and join those white-robed ones who "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth." It will be golden fleece, more precious than the finest gold, laid up where neither moth nor rust can corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal.

This is how the Good Shepherd shears His lambs. He does not take the fleece from them whether they will or no. He does not fleece them for Himself. He takes their willing offerings, cleanses them in His Blood shed

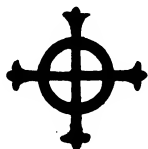
for them, and takes care of the treasure for them.

Jesus "*gathers*" the lambs, such little children as you, with His "arm," brings them to Baptism, to School, to Church, to Sermons, to Confirmation, to Holy Communion, teaches them to come to Him in prayer, by His ministers on earth. He bids them thus "gather the children." (Joel ii. 16.) But how does He gather them by His angels in Heaven? They too, are His "arm," and at the end of the world when the Son of Man, the Chief Shepherd, "shall come in the clouds of Heaven with power and great glory, He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from

one end of Heaven to the other." Oh, dear children, I hope you will be found among His elect in that day. I hope the holy angels will gather you in their arms and carry you up through the bright blue sky to be folded for ever in that safest of folds, the Heavenly City, the New Jerusalem, under the tender care of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. But supposing you die and, even children do die before that Great Coming, where will you go? If you are good and love Jesus you will go to Paradise; and as Paradise before our Lord Jesus went there (S. Luke xxiii. 43), was called "Abraham's bosom" (S. Luke xvi. 22), we may surely now call that happy place of waiting spirits, the "bosom of Jesus." There the lambs

of Jesus who are gathered in by the angel of death, are carried by angels to rest in peace and joyful expectation, until the time comes for the little souls and bodies, separated for a time only by death, to be united again in the great day of Resurrection.

“When the soft dews of kindly sleep
My wearied eyelids gently steep,
Be my last thought how sweet to rest
For ever on my Saviour's breast.”



CATHOLIC SERMONS
FOR CHILDREN.

BY THE REV. J. E. VERNON, M.A.,
Vicar of Bicknoller, Taunton.

NO. V.
THE HOLY CHILD JESUS.

OXFORD:
A. R. MOWBRAY & Co.
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“THE HOLY CHILD JESUS.”

“And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them; but His mother kept all these sayings in her heart.”—S. Luke ii. 51.

A HAPPY Christmas to you, when it comes, dear children, and as it comes this month, this shall be a Christmas sermon. We will think about the Holy Child Jesus, Whose birthday we keep at Christmas.

There never was such a Child born into this world, as that Child Who lay in Mary's arms on the first Christmas

morning. For that little Babe was the Son of God! He had come from Heaven to a manger in a small city on the earth which he had created. From Heaven to a stable! Oh what a change for Him! God, Whom Heaven and the Heaven of Heavens cannot contain, hiding His Glory under the form of a little infant! Neither Heaven nor earth ever saw such a sight as that, nor ever will again. No mother ever nursed such a Babe as that, nor ever will again. No wonder the angels sung "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill to men." No wonder the wise men travelled many a weary mile, and brought their richest treasures, to worship a little Baby, when we remember Who that Baby was. But oh! children, what a wonder

that you and I do not love and honour that Baby more! How great the wonder that we think so little of Him, that we bring so few gifts, that we do not try harder and pray more earnestly, to become as this little child in meekness and lowliness of heart! *This* is the wonder! Angels wondered to see their God clothed in the flesh of a little child, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger, but, if possible, those glorious spirits must wonder still more to see how little that Holy Child is thought of and loved by *Christian* children. O *Christian* child, you have like Him been nursed, a little babe, on your mother's lap, you have like Him known a mother's tender care, like Him you have been brought to God's Temple, and presented to God; but Oh!

does the likeness end *there* ? Have you, like Him, been subject to your parents ? He grew up, as you have grown, from a feeble baby to become a child, and He never said a word that His mother did not love to keep and ponder in her heart ; never a word that was untrue, for He was the Truth Itself ; never a word that was unkind, for He was perfect Love ; never a foolish word, for He was the Wisdom of God ; never an unclean word, for His Purity was without spot ; never an angry word, for He was meek and lowly in heart. Would *your* mother like to keep *all your* sayings in her heart ? All ? Are there not some which she has heard, and many others which she has not heard, but which yet you have spoken, which your dear mother would wish to

forget? Which she could not remember without feeling very unhappy that her darling had said such a thing? Oh, child, called by the sacred name of *Christian*, after *Christ*, think of the Christ-child before you let a word pass your lips that would grieve your mother to hear, and leave the word unsaid! “He went down with” Joseph and Mary “and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them,” not in word only, but in will and deed; not obedient in their presence, and disobedient behind their backs. He who commanded children hundreds of years before, to “honour your father and mother,” now set an example to all children of perfect obedience to parents. Although S. Joseph was not really His father, for He had no father but God, yet He was

subject unto him because he was in the place of a father to Him. Although both S. Joseph and S. Mary owed subjection to Him as their Lord and God, yet He cheerfully submitted to their authority, that He might shew children the way to keep His commandment. Never, in that cottage home at Nazareth was heard an angry blow or cry of child-suffering, the just punishment of a fault. Never from that Holy Child was heard a peevish word, never was His Face disfigured by a sulky look, never did His hands touch what was forbidden. And when He grew old enough to help S. Joseph in the carpenter's shop, never was He found idle or lazy, careless or inattentive, meddling or disobedient,. Nazareth was a very wicked place (*S. John* i. 46) and

the Child Jesus must have seen and heard much wickedness, but He never imitated it, it only pained Him. He

was often called names, no doubt, but

“He reviled not again,”—often illused, but he uttered no threat. I daresay that He Who said, “Blessed are the peace-makers,” often persuaded other children who had quarrelled, to “make it up” and forgive one another. He must often have had too little to eat and drink, and never had any but the plainest fare, yet I am sure He never murmured or was dainty, and I will be bound to say that He often went without a meal Himself to take food to those who were sick and in want. Oh! dear children, we can imagine, we can picture to ourselves the kind of Child Jesus was. Although we are told so

little about His Childhood in the Bible, because we *are* told there how good and gentle and kind and loving He was, and He is "the same, yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

Now, *why* did the Son of God become a little Child, and submit Himself to human parents, and grow up to end a life of poverty and sorrow and suffering by a death of shame upon the Cross? Was it only to set us an example? Oh no! it was that He might win for us a way of escape from eternal suffering which we deserved for our sins, and open the gate of Heaven to *all* believers. God cannot die; but He became man that He might have a life which He could lay down for us all. He came for this. And He came also to set us, men, women, and

children, a perfect example, to give us a perfect life to copy. Nor this only,—He came to give us *power* to follow His holy example. This power he gives us through the means of the Sacraments of His Church. At your baptism you had this power given you. The power is yours if you will only use it,—the power of the Holy Spirit Whom Jesus sent down from Heaven to help us to be good. Use then this power to follow the example of the Holy Child Jesus; pray that Holy Spirit to put into your hearts the love of Jesus, and to give you faith in Him. Try to be in your home what Jesus was at Nazareth; try to be to your dear parents what Jesus was to S. Joseph and S. Mary; try to learn of your teachers as Jesus learned of the doctors in the Temple;

try to be industrious like Him, to deny yourself like Him for the sake of the poor and sick ; try, in short, in all things to speak as He would have spoken, to leave unsaid what He would never have uttered, to act as he would have acted to all around you. And so, little children, shall "Christ be formed in you," and He, looking down from Heaven, shall see in you some reflection of His goodness, and men shall know you to be His, and His angels shall watch over you, and He shall take you, when He comes again in power and great glory, to be with Him for ever in His Eternal Home.



CATHOLIC SERMONS FOR CHILDREN.

BY THE REV. J. E. VERNON, M.A.,

Vicar of Bicknoller, Taunton.

NO. VI.

THE GUIDING EYE OF JESUS.

OXFORD:

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“THE GUIDING EYE OF JESUS.”

“I will inform thee, and teach thee in the way wherein thou shalt go: and I will guide thee with Mine Eye. Be ye not like to horse and mule, which have no understanding: whose mouths must be held with bit and bridle, lest they fall upon thee.” Psalm xxxii. 9, 10.

Do you want to go to Heaven, little friends? I think you do. I think I hear a chorus of eager voices saying, Oh yes, please teach us the way. Now this is just what I am going to try to do in this little sermon, so, dear children, listen.

You know if you wished a horse or a mule to go a certain way, you could not explain to it where you wanted it

to go. You could not get it to understand by words, nor yet by signs, nor yet by looks. You would have to guide it with a bit and bridle. Now there are some people who are like these brute beasts, without understanding. They have eyes, but they see not the signs by which God speaks to them ; they have ears, but they hear not His Voice ; they have hearts, but they understand not with their hearts, that God should heal them. Jesus tells you in the text not to be like those naughty people. He says, "Do not be like horses and mules. Do not be like that bad king Sennacherib to whom I said, 'I will put My hook in thy nose, and My bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest.' Do not be like people who have to be driven and made to do My will ; but, like dear children, look at Me and let Me guide you with Mine Eye. You shall never

go astray, never miss your way so long as you look to me." "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." I am the Way to Heaven.

Now I will tell you a little story that will help you to understand this. A gentleman had a very disobedient little boy, whom he was obliged continually to be punishing. One day he went to visit a poor sick man, and took the child with him. There lay the invalid on a humble, but clean bed. The room was very tidy, and looked bright and cheering. The sick man's only companion was a little girl. She had moved noiselessly but actively about upon the arrival of the visitors to get them comfortably seated; and now she sat at the foot of the bed, her eyes fixed on her father's face. She seemed to read his very thoughts, for, two or three times during the visit, she rose quietly to perform some little office of affection

for him. He had not spoken—he could not speak without pain—but she had read in his eye what he wanted her to do. The little boy was astonished at what he had seen, and you may be sure his father did not fail to point out to him the lesson which he might learn from the little girl's loving obedience. And you, my children, will easily see that the little boy was like a horse or a mule, but that the little girl, who needed no more than a glance of her father's eye, is a far better example for *you* to imitate. Look then to Jesus. His eye is ever upon you. Let your eye be continually lifted up to Him. He cannot guide you with His Eye, if you never look to Him. If Peter, when he tried to walk upon the waters to come to Jesus, had looked to Him, instead of looking at the big waves, he would not have begun to sink. And if the same Peter had not looked to Jesus

when he had denied Him thrice, he would have missed that look of reproachful love which sent him out sobbing and crying over his cowardice into the quiet night. But, you may ask me, how can we look to Jesus and read in His Eye what He would have us to do? Let me try to explain how you may do this.

The way for you to look to Jesus is by thinking of Him. When you turn your thoughts to Him, you seem to see Him; you do see Him with the eye of your soul, which eye, some people rightly call, faith. Now if you have been carefully taught by kind friends, you will know very well Who Jesus is, and what sort of life He led when He was on earth. You will know what things He likes to see in little children. You will know what sort of words He likes to hear them say, and what sort of words it grieves Him to hear. You

will be able to form a pretty good guess what He would have done and said, if He had been in your place. Just as an intelligent child can tell in a moment by father's or mother's eye what it may do or not do, what it may touch or must leave alone, so if you stop a minute to think of Jesus before you speak or act, you can tell whether He would approve of it or no. So, little friends, you can understand now what I mean by looking to Jesus and being guided by His Eye. But there are times when you must look to Jesus for something besides guidance. Do you know what that is? Forgiveness. For even young children sin sometimes, and not a few, very often, I am sorry to say. And every sin must be either punished or forgiven. If it is not forgiven, it will be punished. Sooner or later, "be sure your sin will find you out." Fathers, mothers, teachers, God-

parents, may not find out such and such a sin, but Jesus has seen it, and He will not forget nor forgive it either unless you ask Him to. So if ever you do or say or think anything wrong, tell it to Jesus directly and beg forgiveness. You will see Jesus now looking, oh ! so sad. You will see Him hanging on the Cross with the crown of sharp thorns on His Head, and the big nails through His Hands and Feet, and His Eyes dimmed with Blood. You will think you see the Blood gushing out afresh as from a new wound or an old one reopened. And you will say softly to yourself, “ Ah, that naughtiness of mine did this.” And I may venture to add,—may I not, dears ?—that your eyes will drop a few warm tears, as you kneel down and ask your dear crucified Saviour to forgive you, and to wash away the dark stain of sin in His precious Blood. And then I am sure

you will see with that eye of your soul, a sweet smile of forgiving love on the Face of Jesus, and you will resolve to try your very best not to cast a shade of pain over that Face again.

This is the way to Heaven, dear children; I know no other way. From your first waking in the morning to your lying down to sleep at night, and all the day long, at meals, at work, and at play, look often to Jesus, as I have seen many a bright happy child-face, in the midst of the merriest play, turned up to mother for her approving smile. Look to Jesus for guidance, that you may keep in the right and good way. And, if you are tempted to naughty tempers, untruthfulness, picking and stealing, or any such dreadful sins, think of Jesus. Then, if, after all, you should unhappily have forgotten Jesus, and lost sight of Him, and so been naughty, turn the tearful eye of your

soul still to Jesus and never rest till you have begged His forgiveness. Walk in this way, little friends, and although sometimes it may be narrow, and rough, and thorny, and not many flowers may be seen on it, yet it will lead you at last to, oh! such a lovely City. There the birds sing very sweetly, and angels more sweetly still. There the cool groves wave in the soft breeze, and the sparkling waters of thousands of fountains are playing. There are flowers more and more beautiful than children's hands ever picked, and scents more fragrant than rose or violet. There are such pearly gates, and golden streets, and many-coloured stones, and mansions so grand, and palaces so large, and thrones so splendid, and such happy, happy people, such bright innocent children, such merry shouts of "boys and girls playing in the streets." And there are no pale, sad, sickly faces

there. No angry word or blow is heard there. There is no one blind there, nor deaf, nor dumb, nor crippled, nor weary, nor infirm. And that City is called "Jerusalem which is above," and the King of that City is Jesus, and oh! my children that His loving Eye may never cease to guide you until you come to see that "King in His beauty, and that land which is very far off."



CATHOLIC SERMONS FOR CHILDREN.

BY THE REV. J. E. VERNON, M.A.,

Vicar of Bicknoller, Taunton.

NO. VII.
LITTLE AND WISE.

OXFORD:
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“LITTLE AND WISE.”

“There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise :

The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer ;

The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks ;

“The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands ;

“The spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings’ palaces.”—Prov. xxx. 24, 25, 26, 27, 28.

HERE we are sent to learn lessons of wisdom from certain little, helpless, insignificant, creatures. We are bidden to notice how they use the instincts which their Maker has given them. We are taught that none are too little or feeble to fill some place in God’s creation. The meanest, smallest creature has some work to do for God.

Now let us see what lessons children may learn from ants, conies, locusts, and spiders.

Have you ever watched the little ants going to and fro, on a bright summer day, all very busy, and working hard, some dragging burdens of food to store up in their nest, some running here and there in search of provision? Look at that little ant tugging away at a load bigger than itself; now it has to drag it over a large stone, now between and over blades of grass, formidable obstacles for so small a creature, and yet it perseveres, and with many a hard struggle drags its burden home and lays it safely by for the winter.

Are there no lessons here for a thoughtful child to lay to heart? Yes, surely, the little ants teach you to lay up treasure in Heaven. Now is your working-time; life is your summer in which to prepare your meat for the winter. Some think that their life is

for enjoyment, and they make no provision for the life to come. But those who are wise, like the little ants, work not for time, but for eternity, and are content to wait to enjoy the fruits of their labour hereafter. I know that little children are "a people not strong;" but you need not be idle; every day you may be busy, doing work for God, which He will not forget. Jesus, Who was so pleased with the poor widow's mite, will not think beneath His notice the little offerings that children bring to His treasury. Every day brings its duties, its work, its opportunities of doing good, and of being useful and helpful; there are many difficulties to be overcome, many vexations and disappointments to be patiently borne; but you must not expect to lay up treasure in Heaven without much trouble; and every temptation resisted, every act of kindness and usefulness cheerfully done, every cross

manfully borne, is so much treasure laid up for you in God's storehouse, and you will find it there when the burden and heat of the long summer day is over, and God, Who has seen your secret struggles, "shall reward you openly."

"The conies are but a feeble flock." Some people say they are like rabbits, some say they are mountain-mice. Rabbits are called conies sometimes in this country. Well, have you not seen a rabbit warren? How the little things scamper away to their holes when scared, and peep timidly out when they have reached a place of safety! Not only a real danger, but even the least suspicion of danger is enough for them; they are off and away in a moment. And you, dear children, from sight or sound of evil, from anything which looks even like the least appearance of evil, off and away at once to the Rock of Ages, to hide in

the holes in the smitten Rock, to nestle by the side of the dear Saviour with His five wounds endured for you. You know the hymn,—

“If the evil one prepare,
Or the world, a tempting snare,
I am safe when I abide
In Thy Heart and Wounded Side.

If the flesh, more dangerous still,
Tempt my soul to deeds of ill,
Naught I fear when I abide
In Thy Heart and Wounded Side.’

Very well, then, when you are tempted to be angry, or untruthful, or disobedient, or to do anything wrong, turn your thoughts at once to Jesus hanging wounded and dying on the Cross, and that will be your running to the Rock. If you have time to think about the temptation, if it is some sinful thing you feel inclined to do, although you know you ought not, go to your room and pray to Him to help you to do

right ; take your Bible, and read a few of His kind, gentle words, or part of the story of His sufferings, or look awhile at the picture of the Crucifixion, and so you will have fled to the Rock until the temptation has lost its power, and the danger to your soul has passed away.

Then the locusts. You have never seen a locust ; but they are *something* like large grasshoppers, and they fly in great numbers, darkening the air like a thick cloud, and when they settle they cover the ground, so that you could not walk without treading on them, and they eat up every green thing before them. Read the account of them in the second chapter of the prophet Joel. Well, you must go forth like them in order and battle array against the enemies of your soul. They have no king, but your King is Jesus, and your fellow-soldiers are the saints, and you must not break your ranks,

but keep each one in his place, doing your duty in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call you ; neither must “one thrust another,” but in brotherly love, shoulder to shoulder, march on, ever on, destroying every sinful temper, not leaving behind you any root of bitterness to spring up and trouble you.

Little children, you are not alone, to fight singly against the world, the flesh, and the devil. Jesus is with you, the Holy Spirit strengthens you, your Guardian Angel shields you, the saints living and departed help you with their prayers ; you go forth, like the locusts, by “bands,” in the communion of saints, in the army of the Catholic Church ; you have a share in the Sacramental power of the Church of God.

Lastly, there is your lesson to be learned from the spider. You know what a difficult thing it is to keep

spiders out even of the tidiest and best ordered houses. They will find some nook or corner even in kings' palaces where they spin their webs. Maids may sweep them away, but the persevering little fellows will soon spin another.

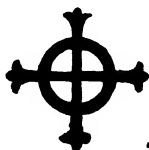
Now you may lay hold with your hands and be in the Palace of the King of kings. S. Paul says, "Lay hold on eternal life," (1 Tim. vi. 12) ; and again, "Charge them that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate ; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may *lay hold on eternal life*." And this reminds us of the ants again. Your "hands," then, are faith and good works. Lay firm hold on God's promises in Christ Jesus with the hand of faith, and spend your life in faithful, loving work for God and His Church, and you shall find a place,

a safe corner in the King's Palace where none shall disturb you. Only you must persevere to the end, never be discouraged by failure, if your good resolutions be broken like spiders' webs resolve afresh, spin another web, and try again. I daresay you know the story of Robert Bruce, and how he learned a lesson in perseverance from a spider which gave him heart to make one more try for his crown, and how he won it. May you, then, dear children, so learn the lessons which God in His Word makes use of these little wise creatures to teach you, that you may win a heavenly crown! And oh! what happiness if, after you have borne the burden and heat of life's brief summer day, you find treasure stored up for you in Heaven! If you may so persevere and "lay hold on the hope set before you," that you may gain a nook in the glorious Palace of the King!

**We are but little children weak,
Nor born in any high estate ;
What can we do for Jesu's sake,
Who is so high and good and great ?**

**O day by day, each Christian child
Has much to do, without, within ;
A death to die for Jesu's sake,
A weary war to wage with sin.**

**There's not a child so small and weak,
But has his little cross to take,
His little work of love and praise,
That he may do for Jesu's sake.**



CATHOLIC SERMONS FOR CHILDREN.

BY THE REV. J. E. VERNON, M.A.,
Vicar of Bicknoller, Taunton.

NO. VIII.
FLOWER PREACHERS.

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“FLOWER PREACHERS.”

“The flowers appear on the earth.”
Song of Songs ii. 12.

EASTER DAY! it will have come and gone by the time you read or hear these words, dear children. But if you are fortunate enough to live near a Church where this Queen of Feasts is duly honoured, you will not yet have forgotten the bright and joyous services of that Day. The Easter Alleluias of the white-robed choir are yet ringing in your ears, and you will hear them yet again, for “the winter” of Lent “is past,” “the rain” of penitential tears “is over and gone,” and “the time of the singing of birds is come.” “The flowers appear on the earth,” and some your little hands have perhaps gathered to deck the House of God with. The flowers, ah, how sweetly they preach the

resurrection from death to life! baptized with the winter rains, the earth so long lying barren and dreary has burst into life and energy and growth. The brown buds have unfolded, the tiny seedlings have pushed up their bright green heads through the mould, the butterflies have burst their chrysalis cases, the little birds have broken out of their pretty egg houses, the lambs are frisking about the green meadows spangled with golden buttercups and silver daisies—all is life and beauty and joy—all tells of resurrection! And children love this happy time and share its joy with birds and flowers. They may not be able to understand much about death and resurrection; but they know that the flowers they love were dead and are alive again, were lost awhile and now are found with returning spring. You know, dear children, in remembrance of Whose Resurrection we keep Easter. In Holy Week, on Good Friday you heard the sad, sad

story of your dear Saviour's sufferings and death. You wondered how men *could* be so cruel to one so gentle and good: how they could dare do such dreadful things to Him, their Lord and God. Did you think of your *sins* as having had anything to do with those insults and sufferings, and that death? For they had, you know, a great deal to do with it; your naughty tempers, and untruths, and disobedience, and greediness, and other sins, cost Jesus that fearful pain and agonising death. Did you think of this, and wonder how *you* could ever have been so cruel to Him Who loves little children so dearly? He died that you might be forgiven. Will you think of this whenever you ask God to forgive you any sin, *what* that forgiveness *cost* which you ask for? But you know that Jesus is not dead now. He did die and was buried, but on the third day, He rose again from the grave, and shewed Himself to His disciples. He did not at once go up

to Heaven with His risen body. He stayed forty days on earth, and then went up to Heaven in the sight of His disciples. But I will tell you about His Ascension another time, we are now keeping Easter in remembrance of His rising from the dead and coming on earth again.

Have you ever seen a funeral? I have no doubt you have. I often wonder why children are so fond of funerals. There are always sure to be plenty of children looking on whenever there is a funeral. And yet, as funerals are too commonly conducted, it is an ugly and dismal sight,—all darkness, gloom, and despair. To look at most of our funerals, you would not think that any one expected that those who are laid in the grave would ever rise up again. But they will, every one of them, at the last day. Not till then. But Jesus rose again on the third day after He was buried. Think what a wonderful thing that was! Suppose you had seen

a funeral on a Friday, and on Sunday morning were to go to the Churchyard and see the person whom you had seen buried, suddenly rise up alive and well out of the earth! well, you know this could not be. Only One has ever done this, Jesus Christ. He had raised up Lazarus, and He will raise up all who are dead when He comes again. He died; but death had no power over Him. He has power over death, so He raised up Himself and He will raise us up too. It would be a dreadful thing if it were not so, if Jesus had not risen again. Then, indeed, we might make our funerals as black and gloomy as possible, we could not make them too much so, if death parted us for ever from those we loved. But now we know that death is but a long sleep, from which we and our dear ones will wake again, and we shall meet to part never more. Now we know that as sure as the leaves appear again on the trees, and flowers appear on the earth, after

the sleep of winter-time, so surely the the dead shall rise again. This is why Easter is such a joyful time. And Jesus makes the flowers appear on earth again every year at this time to tell us that we too shall rise again. How you welcome back your old friends, the primroses and violets and harebells and forget-me-nots! old friends, not other flowers, but the same well known kinds, year after year. And they tell of that joyful meeting that shall be one day when we shall welcome back those old familiar faces "that we have loved long since and lost awhile." Don't forget, dear child, that dear mother who was so long ill and suffering, and at last passed away and was laid in the churchyard where that white cross marks the sacred spot. You will see her again. Don't forget her, think of her often that you may be sure to know her again directly when she comes back. Don't forget that little baby brother, that sweet

sister who played with you and romped in the buttercup fields a few springs, and then fell asleep. She will wake again. Don't forget that dear father whose cold lips you were lifted up to kiss for the last time before they laid him to rest. Think of the old days when you used to have such rides on his knee, and such games at hide and seek. Look forward to seeing him again, for see him you will. When you shout and clap your hands for joy at seeing your old friends the flowers come back again, think of those far dearer old friends, and bless the dear flowers for telling you that they too will come back again. Make a pretty wreath of them and go and hang it on that white cross or lay it on that green mound where an old friend lies who will surely come back to you.

I have said all this because little children do forget so soon, in their light-heartedness, father, mother, brothers and sisters, as they pass away, although

they once loved them so dearly ; and I think it must be because they do not remember that they will surely see them again.

Next, dear children, the appearance of the flowers on earth tells you of your own resurrection. You have been buried, and you have risen again. Yes, when you were christened, you were buried with Christ in Baptism, and you rose again to live a new life, a Christian life, a Christ-like life. Do you know where the flowers get their beautiful colours from ? purple, and yellow, and blue, and white, and red, and orange ? they get all these bright colours from the sun. So you, dear children, are flowers in Christ's garden, and if you live in the light of Him, Who is the Sun of Righteousness, you will get beauty from Him. If you are humble, like the violet, your humility is a reflection of His, Who is meek and lowly in heart. If you are pure-minded, like the white lily or snowdrop, it is His

purity which clothes you with a raiment to which Solomon in all his glory was not to be compared. If you forget Him not, but in all your ways remember Him, you are like the blue forget-me-not, which turns its azure eye up to the sun above. Every grace, every beauty, which shines in a Christian child, comes from the Holy Child Jesus. How you watch the opening buds, the seedlings in your garden growing day by day! So, dears, Jesus watches for these virtues and beauties to unfold themselves in you, and waters you with His grace, and lightens you with His brightness, and warms you with His cherishing love, to help you to become perfect and well opened flowers in His garden, the Church. He watches you to see if you are growing day by day, growing more and more holy and good and obedient and truthful and prayerful and loving. He watches you, and oh! how sad if he should see all His care thrown away upon you! sees you

blighted, and sickly, and dying! Oh, dear children, that you may so grow and bloom in His garden, and give forth a sweet and fragrant scent, that He may raise you up in that great Easter, that glorious spring-time, and when the winter sleep is over, and He the Sun of suns comes, He the Gardener of all gardeners, comes to His garden, and "the little hills," the graves, "rejoice on every side," and the flowers appear on earth that are to bloom for ever in the Paradise of God, that you may not be thrown aside into the weed-heap, but be chosen for transplanting into those flower-beds of rich and varied loveliness and scent which make gay the sweet fields of Eden where decay and death never come, and blighting sin is never known!



CATHOLIC SERMONS FOR CHILDREN.

BY THE REV. J. E. VERNON, M.A.,
Vicar of Bicknoller, Taunton.

NO. IX.
JOY IN RELIGION.

OXFORD:
A. R. MOWBRAY & Co.
LONDON:
SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, & Co.

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“JOY IN RELIGION.”

“And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into Heaven. And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: and were continually in the Temple, praising and blessing God.” S. Luke xxiv. 51, 52, 53.

FORTY days had passed since our Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead. During that time He had not been with His disciples, as He used to be before His Crucifixion, their constant companion. No. He came and went among them in a strange, mysterious way, now appearing suddenly, and presently vanishing as suddenly again; now appearing to one disciple, now to another, again to several assembled together. They were getting accustomed to these sudden appearances and disappearances, which at first filled them with wonder and frightened them.

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They were getting to be prepared for His appearance among them at any moment. How watchful they must have been over their thoughts, words and actions, when they knew that at any moment He might be standing close to them! At last, on this fortieth day He appeared among them for the last time, and giving them a few parting directions, He led them out "as far as to Bethany," and lifted up His hands and blessed them, and while He was in the act of blessing them, "He was parted from them and carried up into Heaven and a cloud received Him out of their sight," and while they gazed after Him, two angels stood near them and told them that He should so come again in like manner as they had seen Him go into Heaven. It is simply told us in the Gospel of S. Luke and the Acts, in few words; but oh! dear children, have you ever tried to picture to yourselves that most wonderful sight? It was wonderful for Him to vanish suddenly out of the sight of Cleopas; just now seen, and then, the next minute, gone none could tell how or

whither! But much more wonderful to see Him while speaking words of blessing, gradually rising up from the ground, His feet no longer touching the earth, rising higher, still higher, and now His feet are above their heads, still moving up, up, before their astonished eyes, until a bright cloud, like that which appeared on the mount of the Transfiguration, steals along like a golden mist and veils Him from their sight; more and more indistinct grows His Form shrouded in the soft light of that cloud, until at last they can see Him no more. Angel voices fall upon their ears, and full of joy and wonder they fall down and worship their ascended Lord, and then turn away and hasten back to Jerusalem.

Now there are two things worth noting about the conduct of the disciples. Firstly, their joy; and secondly, the way they shewed their joy. First, it strikes us as remarkable that they should have rejoiced at all, when their dear Lord was parted from them. When He died upon the Cross, their hearts were full of sorrow, they were "of all men most

miserable, because in this life only” they had “hope in Christ.”

Now, they knew better than they did then ; now, they had seen their Lord alive in the Flesh, victorious over death and the grave. They had learned that He could be present among them, *really*, though unseen. They had His promise, that He would be “with” them “all days, even unto the end of the world.” They had His promise that they should not be left in their weakness to attempt in vain the conversion of an unbelieving world, but that they should in a few days be baptized with the Holy Ghost and endued with power. Before, they had seen their beloved Master conquered, as they thought, by death, and the chief priests and Pharisees triumphant. But now, they had seen Him victorious, triumphant, ascending, a mighty conqueror, on the chariot of fiery cloud, far beyond the reach of His enemies, ascending to plead for His people His all-atoning Sacrifice, ascending, “to receive gifts for men,” ascending to prepare a place for them that where He is, there they

might be also. Moreover, angels had bidden them look forward to His coming again in like manner. Thus, there was much, indeed, to fill their hearts with wondering joy, joy both on His account and their own.

But what a curious way of shewing joy, to go to Church! so some people, some children, may think. "They were continually in the Temple, praising and blessing God." Do you think that going to Church has anything to do with joy? Is there anything *joyful* about religion at all? Do not many children think that religion is a dull, gloomy thing which people must submit to here, in order to have joy, not now, but hereafter, somehow, in Heaven? I am afraid that many grown up people as well as many children have these thoughts about religion. And some well-meaning, but mistaken, people have done much to encourage this idea. They look serious, almost sour, at even innocent merriment and laughter, they think it quite wrong to laugh on Sundays, they do not like much music in the services of the Church, do not like

decorations, flowers on the Altar, beautiful vestments, white surplices, joyful processions, they would banish nearly all light and joy and beauty and music from the services, especially from the Holy Communion, the Feast of Joy and Thanksgiving ; they like sermons preached in dismal black gowns, and sober, solemnly dull services, and bare Communion Tables, and Churches undecorated, and plain even to ugliness. There are such people, but their number is lessening and their influence too ; they are pious, earnest Christians, many of them, and I do not want to say an unkind word about them, but their religion has little or no *joy* in it.

Now, dear children, joy has a great deal to do with religion. It is one of the very first named "fruits of the Spirit." *Gal. v. 22.* True religion is meant to give people, not merely the hope of joy hereafter, but joy *now*. Religious joy should make us *glad* when they say unto us, "Let us go into the House of the Lord." Our worship of God in Church should be the outpouring of joyful hearts in praises to

God. "O be joyful in the Lord, all ye lands; serve the Lord with gladness, and come before His Presence with a song." Sundays should be our happiest days. "This is the day which the Lord hath made, let us rejoice and be glad in it." Obedience to God's commandments should not be thought a wearisome task, but a service of joy. David said, "Thy testimonies have I claimed as mine heritage for ever; and why? they are the very joy of my heart!" God's commandments are not grievous, they are our loving Father's "Rules to gain happiness." What He knows will make us unhappy, He forbids; what He knows will make us joyful and happy, He bids us do. Think, dear children, what are the joys of Heaven. *There* is an everlasting Sabbath, an eternal Lord's Day; *there* we shall worship God and praise and bless Him with great joy; *there* indeed it will be "the very joy of our hearts" to obey perfectly the will of God; *there* will be music and light and beauty in full perfection. Very well then, the religion that is to be so full of joy and delight

to us then, is just the same religion, not another, as we ought to have now ; the same Christian religion in full perfection of unclouded joy which we have here imperfectly and clouded at times with trials and temptation and sad falls. And these clouds, which are caused by our yielding to sin, are *our* fault, they are not part of religion. If we must sometimes be sad and mourn for sin, this sadness does not come from religion, but from our want of religion. The more religious we are, the less often we fall, the more happy we shall be. The oftener we pray, the more joy we shall find in prayer. The oftener we go to Church, and the more heartily we join in the services there, the more delight we shall take in it ; and the brighter the services are, the more they will help us to praise and bless God with great joy ; and the better we keep the commandments of God, the more our hearts will rejoice in them. Oh, dear children, say your prayers as seeing your glorified, risen, ascended Jesus standing over you with Hands uplifted, blessing you ; go to Church, as entering

the very House of God and Gate of Heaven; spend your Sundays as sweet Sabbaths of rest from the tasks and bustle of the week; keep God's commandments as a Golden Rule of Happiness given you by your Father above; keep them with the loving, cheerful obedience of angels, doing His will on earth as it is done in Heaven; so shall you have a sweet foretaste on earth of the joys of Heaven; so shall you have a larger measure *now* of those joys which are at God's right hand, and of those pleasures which are for evermore; so shall all your life be a preparation for Heaven, and religion give you "now in this present time" an hundredfold more joy than it takes from you."

"We love the place, O God,
Wherein Thine honour dwells;
The joy of Thine abode
All earthly joy excels.

"It is the House of Prayer,
Wherein Thy servants meet
And Thou, O Lord, art there
Thy chosen flock to greet.

“We love the sacred Font ;
 For there the Holy Dove
 To pour is ever wont
 His blessing from above.

“We love Thine Altar, Lord,
 Oh what on earth so dear ?
 For there, in faith adored,
 We find Thy Presence near.

“We love the Word of Life,
 The Word that tells of peace,
 Of comfort in the strife,
 And joys that never cease.

“We love to sing below
 For mercies freely given ;
 But oh ! we long to know
 The triumph-song of Heaven.

“Lord Jesus, give us grace
 On earth to love Thee more,
 In Heaven to see Thy Face,
 And with Thy saints adore.

Amen.”



CATHOLIC SERMONS FOR CHILDREN.

BY THE REV. J. E. VERNON, M.A.,
Vicar of Bicknoller, Taunton.

NO. X.
THE RAINBOW.

OXFORD:
A. R. MOWBRAY & Co.
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“THE RAINBOW.”

“And there was a rainbow round about the Throne.” Revelation iv. 3.

I NEED not ask you, dear children, if you have seen a rainbow. But often as you most likely have seen it, you are always glad to see it again. You are never tired of the beautiful sight. Perhaps the rainbow has been a good friend to you more than once. The rain was pouring heavily down and drenching the grass on which you had hoped to have had a merry party, or the storm had come suddenly, just in time to stop your intended game in the hay-field. And so you were looking out of window with a face as dark and gloomy as the clouds, and angry tears were mimicking the raindrops outside. All at once a gleam of sunshine broke through a rift in the cloud and shone on the falling drops of rain, and God hung across the sky the lovely seven-coloured arch. And your face changed too; the

gloom vanished, your eyes lighted up with joy and made a rainbow of your tears. The demon of discontent fled away, and you were your own little bright self again. Do you remember such a time? But beautiful as the rainbow is, more beautiful still is that of which it speaks to us. Well may it drive away anger, for it is a sign of God's anger turned away. It speaks to us of His mercy. You all know the story of Noah, how he came out of the ark in which God had mercifully preserved him when the flood came and destroyed the wicked people. You know that the first thing he did was to build an altar unto the Lord, on which he offered sacrifice as an act of worship and thanksgiving to God. And God accepted his offering and made a covenant with Noah that the waters should no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. Then God appointed the rainbow to be a sign or token of the covenant. God promised that He would "look upon it and remember" His promise. And man was to look upon it too, and remember God's

mercy of which it was a sign and pledge. The rainbow was a sort of sacrament. So the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a sign both to God and man. It is a means of shewing to God the death of the Lord Jesus, that He may "look upon it and remember" His promises of mercy to us in His dear Son. And it is a means whereby man may "look" by faith upon Christ crucified and "remember" His death and "the benefits whereof we are made partakers thereby." It is "a pledge to assure us" of "God in Christ reconciling the world to Himself." It is a sign or token of the Gospel covenant.

But not only is the rainbow a sign to us of God's merciful promise not to destroy the world any more by a flood. We find the rainbow mentioned elsewhere in the Bible as the sign of the Presence of God Himself. See what Ezekiel says of it—Chap. i. 28. "And above the firmament that was over" the heads of the four living creatures, "was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was

the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it. And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of His loins even upward, and from the appearance of His loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about. As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the Glory of the Lord." Where you will notice that the rainbow is the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the God-man, of Him Who is both God and Man, Jesus Christ. So again, in my text, the rainbow is connected with the Presence of the glorious God. "He that sat" upon the throne "was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone," that is, not like them in *form*, but the brightness of His Presence was like the brilliant coloured rays of light which flash from those precious stones—"and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald."

Of course you know, dear children, that the brightest rays of the purest and rarest gems, and all the ethereal loveliness of the hues of the rainbow can but faintly picture to us the glory of God. The creature cannot worthily be compared with the Creator. But "the holy men of old" who "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," try to give us such ideas as men *can* receive of the glory of God's Presence. They dip, as it were, their pencils in rays of light, to describe to us Him Who is the true Light of the world. They use the most beautiful works of nature, that we may learn to "look up through nature, to nature's God." So when we look upon the rainbow, it should remind us not only of the *mercy* of God, but also of the *Glory* of God; not only of His covenant with Noah, but also of His Presence with us. The rainbow never changes. It is always the same. One rainbow is just like another. So it reminds us of God in His neverchanging mercy and glory—"I am the Lord; I change not" says God by the prophet Malachi iii. 6. It

reminds us of "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." *Heb.* xiii. 8. And yet although every rainbow is just the same, we are never tired of it—we always look at it with fresh wonder and delight. So your angels never tire of beholding and admiring the unchanging glory of God. *S. Matt.* xviii. 10. So you, dear children, will never tire, through all eternity, of gazing upon that Glory, if, as I pray, you shall be among those who shall at His coming "see Him as He is."

Again, we always see the rainbow "in the cloud in the day of rain." And this reminds us that "God is a very present help in time of trouble." And life is not all sunshine, no, not even the lives of little children. It is true of them as well as of older people,

"Into each life some rain must fall,
Some days must be dark and dreary."

The rainbow then will help us to realise God's Presence with us in our dark and dreary days of sorrow and mourning and suffering.

And may it not be, dear children, that the rainbow round about the

throne is formed of the tears of sufferers and penitents drawn up from earth into the brightness of the Glory of the Sun of Righteousness ? precious in God's sight are the tears which come from real sorrow for sin, and from suffering borne patiently after the example of the Holy Jesus. He lights them up with the smile of pardon and sympathy and clothes them with more than rainbow hues and gives them beauty for mourning.

Now think, dear children, of the last tears you shed. Were they such tears as God would light up with His approving smile, and make a rainbow of them, or were they such tears as made a dark, angry mist hiding His Face from you ? For there are some tears which God hates to see in children's eyes ; tears of anger when children scream with rage and passion because they cannot have something which they want, or cannot do something which they wish ; tears of impatience, tears of envy, which flow because other children, brothers and sisters, or playmates, are more noticed or have better presents, or are in any

way more successful or fortunate; tears of wilfulness or fretfulness, all tears such as these God grieves to see disfiguring little children's faces, and He cannot turn these into bright rainbows. But there are sweet and holy tears, such as God smiles upon with approving love, such tears as children shed in true sorrow for having done wrong, tears which come from little hearts full of grief that they have displeased the good God, and wounded the loving hearts of dear parents and friends. These tears God shines upon with a bright ray of forgiveness, and they go to make up that rainbow round about the Throne. Then there are tears that flow from the eyes of children when they see any one else in suffering and distress, sweet tears of gentle sympathy and compassion, and these too are drops precious in God's sight such as He loves to gather up and make them shine like jewels in His rainbow crown; above all most dear to Him are tears which children shed when they hear or read the story of the sufferings which His own Son endured for love of them.

Oh these are tears such as God shall wipe away from all eyes for ever in that bright glory-land where "the voice of weeping shall be no more heard, nor the voice of crying." Let not your bright little eyes be clouded, then, dear children, or your faces be made ugly by those wicked, selfish tears ; but when you weep, let your tears be such as you know God can smile upon, and such as He will bless you for shedding, tears which fall for the sorrows of others, for the pain which you may have given to others or see others suffer, unselfish tears, for these only go to make up the rainbow of Heaven.

See then what lessons God's beautiful bow teaches us ! it assures of His Presence, of His mercy, of His unchangeable goodness and beauty, it tells us that even human tears when not sinful are sweet and lovely in the light of God's smile, and that, as even the hairs of our heads are all numbered, so not a tear falls from our eyes unheeded, unobserved by Him, and it bids us think of the exceeding glory and beauty of the Throne of God

around which may you and I one day stand and rejoice in the brightness of His Majesty with angels and archangels and all the company of Heaven for ever and for evermore. And until that never-ending day may never a tear dim your eyes, dear children, which God cannot turn into a rainbow.





CATHOLIC SERMONS FOR CHILDREN.

BY THE REV. J. E. VERNON, M.A.,
Vicar of Bicknoller, Taunton.

No. XI.
MINISTERING CHILDREN.

OXFORD:
A. R. MOWBRAY & Co.
LONDON:
SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, & Co.

OXFORD :

PRINTED BY A. R. MOWBRAY AND CO.

1872.

“MINISTERING CHILDREN.”

“But Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child, girded with a linen ephod.” 1 Samuel ii. 18.

THERE was once a Jewish woman who was very sad because she had no little children, so she went to a place called Shiloh where was the Tabernacle, the only Church which the Jews at that time had, and there, in the House of God, she prayed very earnestly for a little son, and promised that if God would grant her prayer, she would set the boy apart for God's service all the days of his life. The woman's name was Hannah. God sent her a little son soon afterwards, and so she called his name Samuel, which means “asked of God.” See the power of prayer! what great things God will do if only we ask Him from our hearts, as Hannah did! As far as we know, if Hannah had never thought of asking God for a little son, that great prophet Samuel would

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never have been born. We do not know what blessings we lose just because we never think of asking God for them.

Well, Hannah kept her promise and, as soon as Samuel was weaned, she brought him to the Tabernacle to Eli the priest and left him under his care. And Eli taught him to pray and to read the Holy Scriptures and to make himself useful in many ways, by keeping the incense burning on the golden Altar, and trimming the lamps of the great seven-branched candlestick which stood in the Holy of Holies where the ark of God was, and helping him when he offered the morning and evening sacrifices. Meanwhile, God did not forget poor Hannah, who had given up to Him her only child, but after a while God gave her five other little children, three sons and two daughters, for if we give up anything to God, He is sure to give us back more than we give to Him. And Hannah did not forget her little boy Samuel, but made him a little coat and brought it to him every year.

“And the child Samuel grew before the Lord”—and he ministered before the Lord, child though he was, “girded with a linen ephod.” The ephod was a very beautiful garment which was only worn by the priests, it was made of blue, purple, and scarlet thread, twisted with threads of gold. It was made in two pieces, one hanging behind, the other before. From the hinder one, which hung much lower, came a rich girdle, passing under the arms, and fastened over the breast. It had two shoulder-pieces, in which were two large precious stones set in gold, on which the names of the twelve tribes were engraved. The lower part of the robe was hung with pomegranates and little bells of gold, which sounded as he moved. This beautiful dress Samuel was allowed to wear when he ministered before the Lord and helped Eli the priest. But I am sure that Samuel would not be vain and silly enough to be thinking about his fine clothes when he was ministering before the Lord in His Holy Temple. That rich dress was not put

on him to please his eyes nor to attract the admiration of others. You know that when people go to court, to the court of Queen Victoria, they have to put on a court dress out of respect to her. Well, this was little Samuel's court dress, put on out of respect to the King of kings, and meant to remind Samuel in Whose presence he was.

And you, dear children, when you go to Church on the Lord's Day, are dressed in your very best clothes because you are going to court, to a greater court than Queen Victoria's, to the courts of the Lord's House. So I hope that you do not think of your fine clothes when you are there, nor look about you to see how other little boys and girls are dressed. I hope you do not feel vexed if you see other children better dressed than you are, or feel anxious that people should notice how nicely you are dressed. You wear your best clothes, not for your own pleasure, but out of respect to God in Whose House you are, and you must try to think of Him and not

of your clothes whether they are fine or shabby. You go to Church, dear children, not to see or be seen, but to minister before the Lord, as the child Samuel did. Perhaps you are in the choir, and minister before the Lord by helping to lead the praises and prayers of the congregation? if so, you should feel this to be a very great honour and privilege, not a thing to be conceited about, but rather to humble you when you think how unworthy you are of such an honour. And it should make you very careful indeed to sing your very best and to behave your best, and never to forget where you are and before Whom you are called to minister. Some little boy, who reads these words, may be called still nearer to God in His House and employed, as I have seen some boys, in assisting the priest at the Altar when he offers the Christian Sacrifice in the Holy Communion. The nearer you stand to minister before the Lord, the greater your privilege, and the more careful and reverent your behaviour ought to be. But whether you are ministering

before the Lord in the choir or at the Altar, or simply in the congregation, the great thing is to remember that you are ministering before the Lord in His holy Temple. Whether you are dressed in a white surplice, or in your best Sunday clothes, do not think about your dress, but about God, and be more careful about the dress of your soul than about that of your body. If you are not in the choir or serving at the Altar, you have still a ministry to perform. You do not go to Church to hear or look on, but to take your part in the holy services with heart and knee and voice. And God loves to hear the voices of little children, and to see them ministering before Him in His courts on earth as their angels do in His courts above. When the scribes and Pharisees heard "the children crying in the Temple and saying Hosanna to the Son of David," they were angry and wanted our Lord Jesus to stop them, but He reminded them that it was written in the Psalms "Out of the mouth of babes and suckings Thou hast perfected praise." So

you may be sure that Jesus loves to hear children's voices in His Temple. And you will never find the services long or dull or tiring if you join heartily in them. If you could *see* Jesus there, as those Jewish children saw Him, with His kind Face looking so loving and gentle, you could not help singing, as they did, in His honour. Try to act as if you did see Him, and feel that He does see and hear you. He does not care so much how your body is dressed, but He likes to see your soul dressed in its very best, clothed with humility and reverence and love and praise and thankfulness. A clergyman once noticed a poor man in the congregation singing very loud. He had not a good voice and he often sang out of tune. So the clergyman asked him not to sing so loud lest he should put other people out. "Can't help it, Sir," the man answered, "my heart sings." "Oh, very well then, my good man," said the clergyman "sing away by all means."

Remember, dear children, that the services of God's House here on earth

are meant to prepare us to minister before Him in His Temple above. In Church you are practising for Heaven. One, at least, of your chief delights *there* will be to “serve God day and night in His Temple” and each Sabbath here should be a preparation for the eternal Sabbath and a foretaste of its joy. You must try to learn here to put on the manners and behaviour which must be yours if you are ever to minister before the Lord on high. All who shall minister there will be kings and priests, Samuel’s ephod will be nothing to the beauty of the garments which they shall wear, all will be beautiful, form and feature, robe and vestment, wings of rainbow colours and crowns of gold and jewels, sight and sound, all will be beautiful with a loveliness such as earth has never known; but the crowns will be used but to cast at Jesus’ feet, the wings but to veil reverent faces bowed before Him, music but to sound His praises, none of these will be admired or used in and for themselves, but all, all, to do Him honour, all to glorify Him, all will be

forgotten before His glorious Presence and nothing thought of but that God is *there* ; *there* on His great white Throne of dazzling light and splendour, alone to be honoured and adored. Do you not long to be there ? do you not wish to worship Him now as nearly as possible as you will worship Him *then* ? Well then, dear children, go to Church as if you were going to Heaven. Go to Church with this one thought, I am going to minister before the Lord, as little Samuel did of old. Jesus will be there. He Who is ministered to by cherubim and seraphim, by angels and archangels, and by all the company of Heaven, invites me, a little child, to join my voice to theirs, to come into His presence, to minister before Him. His eye will be upon me, His ear listening for my words of prayer and praise. "This is none other but the House of God, this is the gate of Heaven." If you go with these thoughts and in this spirit, you will not find the holy service wearisome, you will not wish it to be over soon that you may get out again, you will not look about you or wonder

and angels wish you to be, then you will hear one day from the lips of Jesus —“Come, ye blessed children of My Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world ;” but if not,—ah ! there is only one other manner of children that you can be, from which may God preserve you,—children of the devil !

Glad sight ! the holy Church
 Spreads forth her wings of love,
 To welcome to her breast a child
 Begotten from above ;
 Begotten at the font
 By God the Spirit's power,
 A gentle lamb from Satan snatch'd,
 In childhood's helpless hour.
 E'en now around the font,
 Unseen by mortal eye,
 Bright ministering angels watch
 The wondrous mystery.
 There to receive their charge,
 In readiness they stand,
 And long to guide its feeble steps
 To their own happy land.
 And all the host of heaven
 Rejoice before the Lord,
 To see a child of fallen man
 A child of God restored.



CATHOLIC SERMONS FOR CHILDREN.

BY THE REV. J. E. VERNON, M.A.,
Vicar of Bicknoller, Taunton.

NO. XII.
AN IMPORTANT QUESTION.

OXFORD:
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“PREPARATION FOR FIRST COMMUNION.”

“Furthermore David the King said unto all the congregation, Solomon, my son, whom alone God hath chosen, is yet young and tender, and the work is great : for the palace is not for man, but for the Lord God.”—1 Chronicles xxix. 1.

You have all heard of Solomon, the great and wise king, of his splendour and riches, and the beautiful temple which he built, and his grand palaces and ivory throne and pleasure grounds. God chose him, you know, from among David's many sons, “to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel.” And God said also to David, “Solomon thy son, he shall build My House and My Courts ; for I have chosen him to be My son, and I will be his Father.” And so, while Solomon was yet a “young and tender” child, he had this great work before him to do, to prepare to build a palace for the King of kings, the Lord God ; he was

the chosen inheritor of a great kingdom. How often the boy must have thought of this great work ! how anxious he must have been to do it well ! what preparations he made for building this Temple long before he began it ! We know that he must have been very anxious about it from his prayer when God appeared to him in a dream by night, and said, "Ask what I shall give thee." For Solomon said, "I am but a little child : I know not how to go out or come in. Give therefore Thy servant an understanding heart." He felt the great responsibility of having to rule over a kingdom of God's chosen people, and so he asked wisdom and understanding that he might be able to do it rightly. And, as he felt so anxious about the kingdom, no doubt he felt also very anxious to carry out the work of building the Temple which God had chosen him to do. His father, David, had again and again impressed upon him the importance of this work. He said to Solomon, "Take heed now ; for the Lord hath chosen thee to build an house for the sanctuary : be strong and do it." And again, David said to Solomon his son, "Be strong and of good courage, and do it : fear not, nor

be dismayed : for the Lord God, even my God, will be with thee ; He will not fail thee nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the Lord." God had given to David a pattern of the Temple which Solomon was to build, as David said, "All this the Lord made me understand in writing by His Hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern." And you know how that, after David's death, when Solomon came to the throne, he built that glorious Temple, a type of that "Building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." It took many years to prepare for it, and to finish it, and then it was dedicated to God in that wonderful prayer of Solomon's, and with all those costly sacrifices and splendid rites, of which you may read in *2 Chronicles* 5, 6, 7.

Now all this is typical, that is, it was a figure of what was to come, an acted prophecy. Solomon was a type of Jesus Christ, God's beloved Son in Whom He is well pleased. Solomon's kingdom was a type of Christ's Kingdom of Peace and Truth and Justice. The Temple was a type of that Spiritual Temple, whose stones are saints, and

which is adorned with the virtues which God gave them. The "great work" which Solomon had before him while yet young and tender, was a type of the great, the far greater, work which the Holy Child Jesus had before Him, and which He spent His early years in preparing for, as He spent His later years in carrying it out. In the carpenter's shop at Nazareth, Jesus was preparing materials for that great work, not, indeed, materials of wood and stone, but preparing Himself, by prayer and obedience and self-denial and suffering, to build that eternal and glorious Temple, His Church, a palace, not for man, but for the Lord God.

And you, dear children, every one of you has a "great work" to do ; you who were made in your Baptism inheritors of the kingdom of heaven, you have a palace to prepare, not for man, but for the Lord God. Yes, young and tender as you yet are, you are not too young to begin to prepare a palace in your hearts for the Lord God to come and take possession of and dwell in for ever. Do not suppose that there is plenty of time before you, or that you are too young to begin the work yet. It is a "*great work*," and cannot be

done in a hurry, in a short time. If it was such a great work to build for God a palace of wood and stone that Solomon had to begin to think of it, and learn about it, and prepare for it so many years before, how much more necessary is it for you to begin years and years before to think about, and to learn, and to prepare for your much greater work of making ready a dwelling for the Lord God in your hearts! Yes, the great thing which you all have to look forward to all your childhood is your Confirmation and first Communion. For at your first Communion the Lord Jesus Christ will come to dwell in you if you have carefully prepared a place for Him. How carefully ought you to prepare yourself, then, for the coming of so great a King! How early you ought to begin!

My dear children, suppose that you had a message that on a certain day the Prince of Wales would come to visit you in your home, what pains you would take to prepare for his arrival! How carefully the house would be cleaned, and everything brightened up and set in order, and made to look as nice as possible! Everything would be put in its place, and everything

dirty or broken or untidy would be put away. You would scarcely think or talk of anything else for weeks beforehand but the Prince's visit. How much more, then, when you are to receive a visit from the King of kings and Lord of lords! How many things you have got to put away that would offend His eyes! How many naughty tempers, bad habits, evil dispositions, must be got rid of! And will you not think with what graces and virtues you can adorn yourself that you may be a palace for the Lord God? He would like to see in you when He comes "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit." He would like to find the instruction of thy father and the law of thy mother; "for they," Solomon says, "shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head and chains about thy neck." He would have you "clothed with humility," "rich in faith," which is much more precious than the perishable gold with which Solomon adorned the Temple, decked with those precious jewels, soberness, temperance, chastity, truthfulness, and, above all, love. "Finally, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are

lovely, whatsoever things are of good report ; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." Think of them, pray for them, try to get adorned with them, that He Who has gone to prepare a place for you in the mansions of His Father's House, may find that you have done your best to prepare a place for Him when He comes to you in that Holy Sacrament.

And if you say, my dear children, as well you may, "Who is sufficient for these things?" How can I, a little child, do so great a work ? Remember what the Lord said to S. Paul, "My grace is sufficient for thee : for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Remember that Confirmation comes before first Communion. At your Confirmation, grace sufficient will be given you, God's strength will be made perfect in your weakness.

Not that you are to suppose that, with all your preparation and all your trying, you can ever really become *fit* or *worthy* for the Lord God to dwell in you. After all Solomon's preparations and painstaking, his temple, you may be sure, was but a poor copy of the heavenly pattern which God gave to

David. With all its cedar, and gold, and precious stones, the Temple was, after all, but a poor palace for the Lord God Who made heaven and earth and all things in them ; it was no more *worthy* to receive Him to dwell in it than was the stable at Bethlehem. But were all Solomon's pains therefore wasted ? Might he just as well have spared himself and his people the expense and trouble ? Oh no ! he had done his best, and "if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." He could not do impossibilities ; and it is an impossibility for any amount of gold, jewels, and workmanship to produce a palace good enough for the Lord God.

So with you, dear children, you cannot become *good enough* for Jesus to dwell in ; you cannot copy perfectly the pattern which He has set you ; you cannot by any care and length of preparation become *fit* to receive the Blessed Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ. But are you, then, to think that it is no good making preparations or taking pains about it ? Certainly not. You cannot become all you would wish ; but you must not be

idle, you must do your very best. And then, you will come to your first Communion, depending upon the Sacrifice which Jesus offered for you on the Cross, and which is offered as our only plea for acceptance in that Holy Sacrament. Solomon felt that, after all that he had done, it was an act of great condescension for the Lord God to come to dwell in so poor a palace. He said, "But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less this house which I have built!" But God accepted Solomon's labour and work, and "when he had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord filled the house."

So, my dear children, be sure that if you spend your childhood in preparation for your first Communion, "your labour will not be in vain in the Lord." You will kneel before the Altar and receive the Body and Blood of Jesus, that He may dwell in you and you in Him. He will come to take possession of His Temple. Only, meanwhile, think how pure and clean from stain of sin

you ought to keep that body wherein
 Jesus is to dwell, that heart which is to
 be His sanctuary !

Blest are the pure in heart,
 For they shall see our God ;
 The secret of the Lord is theirs,
 Their soul is Christ's abode.

The Lord, Who left the heavens,
 Our life and peace to bring,
 To dwell in lowliness with men,
 Their Pattern and their King ;

He to the lowly soul
 Doth still Himself impart,
 And for His dwelling and His throne
 Chooseth the pure in heart.

Lord, we Thy Presence seek ;
 May ours this blessing be ;
 Give us a pure and lowly heart,
 A temple meet for thee.



CATHOLIC SERMONS FOR CHILDREN.

BY THE REV. J. E. VERNON, M.A.,
Vicar of Bicknoller, Taunton.

NO. XIV.

"BIBLE FAIRIES."

OXFORD:
A. R. MOWBRAY & Co.
LONDON:
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“BIBLE FAIRIES.”

“*Who maketh His Angels spirits ; His ministers a flaming fire.*”—*Psalm*
civ. 4.

ALL children delight in ghost stories and in tales about fairies and genii and so on. Now, what if I were to tell you that the best book of ghost stories and fairy tales is the Bible? And indeed I know of no better one, for the Bible is full of such tales, and what is more, they are all true; only, in the Bible, they are not called fairies, but angels; not ghosts, but spirits. An angel is a ghost or spirit. The word “angel” means “a messenger.” Angels are simply spirits sent as messengers of God. You cannot see a spirit any more than you can see the wind. So, when angels have appeared to men, they have taken some form in which they could be seen for a time. Now you will get

this sermon soon after Michaelmas day, that is, the Festival of S. Michael and All Angels, so I will tell you something about the holy Angels. You must not suppose that angels are something like men or women with wings, as you see them in pictures. No, they are far more glorious than that. Only, as we no more know what they are really like than we know what the wind is like, they are represented in pictures in human form, the form in which they have sometimes appeared to men. There are good angels and bad angels, just as in your fairy tales you read about good fairies and bad fairies, good genii and wicked genii. Bad angels are called devils or evil spirits. Sometimes there is a battle between them, as you heard on Michaelmas day that Michael fought and his angels, and the Devil fought and his angels. And when you are tempted to do wrong, and have a hard fight and struggle to do right, you may be sure that your good angel is fighting with the evil spirit that tempts you, and

as, when Moses on the mount held up his hands, the Israelites prevailed, but when he hung down his hands through weariness Amalek prevailed, so it depends upon your will whether or not your good angel is able to conquer the evil spirit for you. If you fight bravely and have a good will to do right, your angel will win the day ; if you are faint-hearted and give way, your good angel will not be able to drive away the evil one. "Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees," and your angel will "resist the devil" and make him "flee from you."

There are different degrees and ranks among the holy Angels ; there are Archangels, or chief Angels, as Michael, Raphael, and Gabriel ; there are also Seraphim and Cherubim, Thrones, Dominions, Principalities, Virtues, and Powers. And they have different offices and ministries of love. Jacob saw in a vision a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, and the Angels of God going up and down upon it. Some angels have charge

over the elements, one has power over the east wind, another over the west wind, others over the north and south winds (*Rev.* vii. 1.); one Angel has power over fire, (*Rev.* xiv. 18.) One has power over the earth, another over the sea, another over the rivers and fountains (*Rev.* xvi.) Another has power over the sun and heat, (*Rev.* xvi. 8.) Some have guard over nations, (*Daniel* x. 13, 20.) An Angel came down to the pool of Bethesda and gave the waters a healing power, and so doubtless the medicinal waters of Bath, Matlock, and other places have their virtue from Angels. Some Angels guard us from danger, as the Angel who preserved Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the burning fiery furnace (*Dan.* iii. 28), and the Angel who was sent to stop the lions' mouths that they might not hurt Daniel (*Dan.* vi. 22), and the army of Angels which protected Elisha at Dothan (*2. Kings* vi. 17). An Angel passed over the land of Egypt and smote the first-born, that God's people might be delivered. An Angel smote

the host of Sennacherib which was encamped against Jerusalem. An Angel freed S. Peter from prison.

Other Angels bring food to God's servants, as the Angel who brought food to Elijah (1. *Kings* xix. 5, 6), the Angel who guided Habbacuc to Daniel in the lions' den (Bel and the dragon, 34—36), and the Angel who shewed Hagar the well of water, (*Gen.* xxi. 19). Some Angels are employed to execute the wrath of God, as the Angels who smote Sodom and Gomorrah (*Gen.* xix), the Angel who punished David's sin by a pestilence which killed 70,000 men (2. *Sam.* xxiv. 16, 17), the Angel who smote Herod (*Acts* xii. 23), and the Angels who pour out the vials of the wrath of God, (*Rev.* xvi.) Some Angels make known the will of God to men, as the Angel who was sent to rebuke and instruct Balaam, (*Numbers* xxii.), the Angels who delivered the law to Moses on Mount Sinai (*Acts* vii. 53), the Angel who appeared to Manoah and his wife (*Judges* xiii.), the Angel Gabriel who was sent to Zacharias and the

Blessed Virgin (*S. Luke* i.), the Angels who appeared to S. Joseph (*S. Matt.* i. 20 ; ii. 19). The Angels take the greatest interest in our salvation, rejoicing over the repentant sinner. Guardian Angels are appointed over us at our Baptism (*S. Matt.* xviii. 10), are "sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation" (*Heb.* i. 14), encamp about those who fear God and deliver them (*Psalms* xxxiv. 7). They offer our prayers before God (*Rev.* viii. 3 ; *Tobit* xii. 12, 15), are with us in public worship (*1. Cor.* xi. 10), and especially at Holy Communion where "with Angels and Archangels and all the company of Heaven, we laud and magnify" God's glorious Name ; and when we die, if we die in the Love of Jesus, they will bear our souls to Paradise (*S. Luke* xvi. 22). The voice of an Archangel will announce the coming of our Lord and summon the dead to judgment ; and Angels will gather together God's chosen ones and separate the good from the wicked, (*1. Thess.* iv. 16 ; *S. Matt.* xxiv. 31 ; xiii. 41.).

Now, my dear children, if you will look out all these texts in your Bibles and read those wonderful Angel-stories, I am sure that your trouble will be well repaid. You will see that God has, indeed, as the Collect says, "ordained and constituted the services of Angels in a wonderful order." You will see what powerful and glorious beings the Angels are, and how we are surrounded by their ministries in earth, and sea, and sky. You will be ready to sing, with the three holy children, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, "O all ye Angels of the Lord, O ye sun and moon, stars of heaven, showers and dew, winds of God, light and darkness, mountains and hills, green things upon the earth, bless ye the Lord, praise Him and magnify Him for ever!" Whenever you look abroad, you will be reminded of those most gracious and holy Beings, the servants of the Holiest, who deign to minister to the heirs of salvation. "Every breath of air and ray of light and heat, every beautiful prospect, is, as it were, the skirts of

their garments, the waving of the robes of those whose faces see God in Heaven." And you will learn how to obey God by thinking of the Angels how they serve Him. You will be ashamed to be idle, while they are so active. Night and day they are ceaselessly employed in the service of God; some adoring and praising Him; some making the wind and storm fulfil His word; some carrying the prayers of men, women, and little children up to the Throne of God; some bearing blessings from God in answer to prayer down to earth; some taking care of the poor sailors on the treacherous seas; some bringing healing to the sick, or soothing and strengthening them in their anguish; some bearing the souls of the righteous to the land "where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest;" some guiding to the doors of the poor those who have means to relieve their wants; some restraining evil spirits from tempting us above that we are able to bear; some shielding us from bodily injury, as it is

written, "He shall give His Angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." All, all are ever busy, doing some good. Some are greater than others; some have higher work to do than others; some rule over the destinies of nations; some have only a little child of some poor man to take charge of; yet none envy others, none murmur because others are set over them or preferred before them. And none of them find it hard or disagreeable to do what God tells them. They love to do His commands, to do just what he tells them *because* He tells them, without wondering or asking why. And so they are perfectly happy always, as we should be if we did the same. O what a happy place earth would be if only men did God's will as it is done in Heaven! God has ordained and constituted the services of men, as well as Angels, in a wonderful order; He has given us each our rank and station in life, He has given us each our work to do

according to our station ; He has given us all, commandments to obey and a copy to imitate, even the life of His dear Son ; and we can only be happy by obeying and serving Him cheerfully and willingly as the Angels do. Only by doing this to the utmost of our power can we hope to go, through His great mercy in Christ Jesus, to that sweet Fairy-land where the bright Angels live. All who go there will have, like the Angels, their work to do for God. None will be idle there. There will be rest from pain and temptation to do wrong, but there will not be rest from work, work in doing which we shall never be weary, as they are never weary.

And oh, dear children, what a sweet place that Fairy-land will be ! All that you may have read in books of the beauty of Fairy-palaces and gardens, is nothing to the palaces of Heaven among which Jesus has gone to prepare a place for them that love Him. All the sweet songs and musical sounds that you have heard are nothing to the melody of Angels'

songs. There you will see your Guardian-Angel who was given to you at your Baptism; you will hear from his lips from what dangers he, at God's command, saved you, what gifts you received from his unseen hands, sent to you through him by the "Giver of every good and perfect gift." You will learn how it was by his assistance that you were enabled to bear this or that pain so bravely; he will tell you how sorrowful you made him sometimes by doing wrong, and how glad he felt when you repented and returned to the right way. You will see him and all the other glorious Angels whose faces are "as the appearance of lightning, and their eyes as lamps of fire," who move through the heavens with the ease and swiftness of the wind, or as the stars which you see shoot from one part of the sky to another. But, above all, you will see the King and Lord of Angels, Him who gave them all their power and beauty, Who is far more glorious and mighty than them all, "chief among ten thousand and altogether lovely."

You will see Him before Whom those heavenly hosts veil their faces and bow low in adoration. O how the Angels love Him! and yet He did not take their nature upon Him, as He took ours. He did not become one of them, as He became one of us. He only created them; He has both created us and redeemed us by His precious Blood shed for us upon the Cross. We owe Him therefore more love than even they do, yet oh! that we loved Him as much as they! oh! that we loved Him with a thousandth part of the love which makes Him all in all to the very least of that Angelic host! We have opportunities of shewing our love to Him which they have not, for they have no temptations to resist for love of Him, no pains to bear for love of Him, no ridicule and mocking to put up with for love of Him, no pleasures to give up for love of Him. And *we* can shew our love to Him in all these ways, if we really do love Him. How gladly would they bear any suffering, fight against every temptation, put up with any unkind-

ness, for His dear sake Whom they love so well! ah! that we for whom He took human flesh and suffered and died, were not so selfish, so faint-hearted, so slothful, and disobedient!

“ I love the Holy Angels,
 So beautiful and bright ;
 And though I cannot see them,
 They're with me day and night.
 They watch around my bedside,
 They see me at my play ;
 They know my every action,
 They hear the words I say.

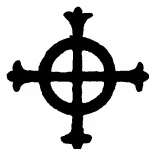
“ 'Tis God, our Heavenly Father,
 Who doth the Angels send,
 To guard His little children
 Until their life shall end.
 When I am cross and naughty
 The Holy Angels grieve ;
 For they are sad when children
 The way of goodness leave.

“ And, when I die, the Angels
 Will bear my soul away,
 While here my body resteth
 Until the Judgment Day.
 They'll bear me softly, gently,
 With loving care most sweet,
 And lay me down in safety,
 At my Redeemer's feet.

"There, with the Holy Angels,
 And holy men of old,
 And all good friends who loved me,
 Too many to be told ;
 Among the flowers of Heaven,
 That never die or fade,
 And far more lovely music
 Than here on earth is made—

"Shall I be,—with the Angels,
 And all that people bright,
 For ever and for ever,
 In God's most glorious light ;
 For ever, ever happy,
 Together shall we be :
 For there our Lord and Saviour
 For ever we shall see !"





CATHOLIC SERMONS FOR CHILDREN.

BY THE REV. J. E. VERNON, M.A.,
Vicar of Bicknoller, Taunton.

NO. XV.
"THE LITTLE MAID OF GALILEE."

OXFORD:
A. R. MOWBRAY & Co.
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“THE LITTLE MAID OF GALILEE.

*“My little daughter lieth at the point
of death.”—S. Mark v. 23.*

ONCE upon a time in a far off land there lived a little girl. She was twelve years old when the story begins, and being an only child her father and mother loved her very, very much. One day she felt ill, grew worse and worse, and had to lie in bed. The doctor was sent for, and he gave her medicines to make her better, but all in vain, she still grew worse, until her parents were very much alarmed about her. She no longer cared for her pets or playthings, nothing interested or amused her, only she liked her mother to sing songs to her and soothe her in her pain. Gradually she wasted away, the once blooming cheek grew paler and thinner every day; the eyes that used to sparkle with fun and joy were dim and heavy now; all her beautiful black hair had been cut off close to

her head ; the merry laugh that used to ring through the house, had died away now into a weary moan. The rough fishermen on the shores of Galilee missed their little companion who used to cheer their intervals of toil by her pretty pranks, and sing to them as they mended their nets, and many a one of them brushed a tear from his sunburnt cheek when his eager enquiry after the little maid was met by the same answer, "no better." "There's only One that could cure her," at last they said, "and He's away on the other side of the lake, or maybe He'd come and lay His hands on her and heal her, as He's done for many sick folk." And the poor father and mother came to think and say the same. "Oh, if the carpenter's son were here, Jesus of Nazareth ! He has cured many with a word and a touch, when the doctors had quite given them over." At last comes a fisherman running, out of breath, to say, "He has come back across the lake, Jesus is at hand !" And the almost heart-broken father hurries out of the house and away down the streets of Capernaum, to

throw himself at the feet of the poor despised carpenter; he, great man as he was, a ruler of the synagogue, humbles himself to beg of Him of Whom the Pharisees once scornfully asked, "Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on Him?" He might lose for this his high position and all the esteem of his fellow-rulers, he might even be cast out of the synagogue; if he thought of all this he cared little for it then, he only thought "My little daughter lieth at the point of death, and here is the only One who can save her," and with this cry he falls at Jesus' feet, "I pray Thee, come and lay Thy hands on her, that she may be healed, and she shall live."

Jesus never heard unmoved such a request as this, the prayer is no sooner uttered than it is granted—"Jesus went with him." But His progress did not keep pace with the father's eagerness and haste. People crowded round, and He could go but slowly for the throng. A poor afflicted woman forces her way through the press, and causes a further delay, she did not mean to stop Him, she would not ask

Him to heal her, if she could but touch His clothes, it would be enough, but no sooner had she done so, than He stopped and turned round to ask who had touched Him. Her joy at having gained her wish and felt herself cured, now gives way to fear lest she had taken too great a liberty, and drawn upon herself the anger of this man of wonderful power. She hangs back and hopes to escape observation in the crowd. But His eye is upon her, and she sees that she cannot be hid, and fearing and trembling falls down before Him and tells Him all the truth. He hastens to drive away her fears and confirms her cure with the kind words "Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole: go in peace and be whole of thy plague." But what were the poor father's feelings during this delay, as he thought of his little daughter's fast-ebbing life, and the agonised suspense of the waiting mother? How did his heart sink within him when his worst fears were realised as they came and told him that all was over—"Thy daughter is dead; why troublest thou the Master any further?" But the brave, patient father's faith did

not fail him even then. He turns to Jesus still in his trouble, and says "my daughter is even now dead! but come and lay Thy hands on her, and she shall live." And Jesus strengthens his faith according to his trial, "Be not afraid: only believe." So they went on together, Jesus sending away the crowd now and taking with Him only Peter, James, and John. When at last they reached the house, they find people weeping and wailing, and hired mourners increasing the tumult with a din of lamentable sounds on musical instruments, according to the foolish custom of that country, and when Jesus endeavours to quiet the wild uproar, telling them "she is not dead but sleepeth," they all laugh scornfully at His words. But He puts them all out, and, with the three disciples and the father and mother, stands by the bed of death. Yes, she is dead, lying there so still and calm in that sleep from which no human power can arouse her. No human power; but a power more than human is there. He who is the "Resurrection and the life" takes the poor cold hand in His, and simply saying, "Damsel, I say unto

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thee, Arise," gives back the soul to the body which it so lately had left. And now once more the sunshine has come back to that home, once more the joyful mother can fold her darling in her arms and feel her answering kisses on her cheek; once more those nimble feet shall run along the seashore, and her glad song cheer the hearts of the old fishermen, Oh, as the fresh young life bounded in her veins, as she looked once more upon the bright waves of Galilee dancing in the sun, and heard the sweet songs of the birds as she wandered in the green fields, did she remember Him Who had called her back to them all again? did she feel in memory again and again the gentle pressure of that gracious Hand? did she weep when she heard how it had been pierced with the cruel nail which pinned it to the cross? did the remembrance of that grave kind Face abide with her to the end of her days, and cheer her departing soul when again death came to claim her as His own—that Face upon which her eyes first rested when she came back to earth again? We are not told; but we cannot think

that He was ever forgotten by that little maid,—we cannot believe that she spent that restored life in the service of His threefold enemy, the world, the flesh, and the devil! What she saw and heard in that spirit-world upon which her soul had opened awhile, we may not know; but it must have been enough to have made an impression on her after-life which time could never efface; enough to make her live not for time, but for eternity; not for earth, but for Heaven. The angels who were bearing her soul to Paradise must have whispered to her such tales of that fair land, that she could not but long for the hour to come when she should be free to soar thitherward again on their rustling wings. My dear children, this little maid was not too young to know sickness and suffering, was not too young to die, nor are you. The hay-maker mows down with his scythe the baby buds of the fair meadow-flowers as well as the fully opened blossom whose bloom is already decaying. So Death spares neither young nor old. A month passes between each of these sermons which I write for you. A

whole month! how many children have died between this sermon and the last? Some child may read or hear one of these little sermons, and before the next comes out, the bright eyes are closed in death, the little voice hushed in the grave! or one of you whom these words shall reach may be now lying on a sick bed, well and strong though you were a month ago. Sick children will have been interested in hearing the story of the little maid whom Jesus raised from the dead, and their quick minds will have caught its lessons without my pointing them out. They will have noticed how ready Jesus, the children's Friend, was to go to the dying girl, and, if He lingered somewhat, His help was none the less effectual when it did come. Her parents' faith and patience were exercised by the delay, and they learned the meaning of those words they must have often sung. "O tarry thou the Lord's leisure, be strong, and He shall comfort thine heart; and put thou thy trust in the Lord." His delay, too, gave the little maid a glimpse into that world beyond, which she would not have had, if He had

healed her, as He might, the moment He heard the poor father's prayer. So sick children will have learned from this story to pray with faith and patience, and not to think that Jesus does not hear them nor care about them because He does not make them well or ease their pain at once. They will learn to trust Him, and believe that He has a wise and kind reason for delay. They will learn, too, that if they die, it will only be like falling asleep to be awakened by the voice of Jesus when the time comes for Him to bid them "arise."

But most of you who read these words are not sick ; yet you may remember a time when you were. Perhaps you suffered very much and were very ill indeed, even hard at death's door ; but though you saw Him not, Jesus came and stood by your bedside, and raised you up again, gave back the bloom of health to your cheeks, and sent you out from the sick room free and happy, as a bird uncaged, to roam about the green fields and lanes which you had pined for as you lay tossing on that bed of pain, and which at one time you almost feared you would never see again. You

have not forgotten Him, have you? Oh no! all nature reminds you of Him. The little sparrows that chirp and twitter about your path remind you of His loving care, Who said, "Ye are of more value than many sparrows." The pretty field flowers bring to your mind His charge to "consider the lilies of the field." The lambs frisking at play lead your thoughts to the Good Shepherd; the waving corn, the vine, the thornbush, the trees of the wood, the ploughman, the sower, the reaper, the burning weeds, the gathered sheaves, the wells and streams of running water, the gardens,—all these speak of Him to those who have ears to hear. Try to remember, or to find out in your Bibles, where He has spoken of each of these, or in what way they should remind you of Him. Yes, He gave you back your life, not that you might spend it in forgetfulness of Him, but that you may shew how well you remember His kindness, and how grateful you can be for it. He gave you back all these sights and sounds of nature, not for selfish enjoyment, but to use and enjoy as helps to remember Him.

But, dear children, whether you are

sick or recovered, or strong and healthy, there is one lesson for you all from the story of the Galilæan maid, for all of you who have been baptized have died and been buried and have risen again, and are bound to "yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead." (*Romans* vi. 13.) For what is Baptism? "A death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness." The old way, and, strictly speaking, the proper way, of baptizing people shewed this more clearly than the present more general way of pouring water on the forehead. For the old way was to dip the whole body, head and all, right under the water, so that the person baptized was buried out of sight for a moment, and then rose again out of the water. This is what the Church orders to be done to every child or grown-up person brought to be christened, only *allowing* water to be poured on them if the godfathers and godmothers are able to certify that the child is really too delicate to bear it. If you saw this done you would understand more easily what S. Paul meant when he wrote to the Romans, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were bap-

tized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by Baptism into death : that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." You ought to live, then, a resurrection life, as if you had died and done with the world, its pomps and vanity, the flesh, its sinful lusts and passions, the devil and all his wicked works, for ever. You have got to live a new life, a life of faith and love and obedience and purity, a life of watchfulness and prayer, as those whose life has been given them back from the dead. Think how differently that little maid must have looked on life from other girls of her age, how little she can have cared about fine dress, and eating and drinking, and being praised and admired ! She had seen sights and heard sounds not of earth, and "tasted the powers of the world to come," and you may be sure she had not the same relish for worldly pleasures and vanities which others had. So ought you, children of God, to be unlike the children of the world, living as heirs of the kingdom of heaven, desiring "a better

country, that is, an heavenly;" and then God will not be ashamed to be called your God ; for He hath prepared for you a city.

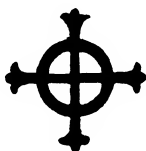
With Christ we share a mystic grave,
 With Christ we buried lie ;
 But 'tis not in the darksome cave
 By mournful Calvary.

The pure and bright Baptismal flood
 Entombs our nature's stain ;
 New creatures from the cleansing wave,
 With Christ we rise again.

Thrice blest, if through this world of sin,
 And lust, and selfish care,
 Our resurrection-mantle white
 And undefiled we wear.

Thrice blest, if through the gate of death,
 Glorious at last and free,
 We to our joyful rising pass,
 O Risen Lord, with Thee. Amen.





CATHOLIC SERMONS FOR CHILDREN.

BY THE REV. J. E. VERNON, M.A.,
Vicar of Bicknoller, Taunton.

NO. XVI.
"THE MURDER OF THE INNOCENTS."

OXFORD:
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“THE MURDER OF THE INNOCENTS.”

*“These are they which follow the Lamb
whithersoever He goeth.” Revelation
xiv. 4.*

You all know, dear children, the story of the Holy Innocents, the little babes who were slaughtered by cruel King Herod. When the wise men came from the east, guided by the star, seeking Him that was born King of the Jews, that they might worship Him, Herod, who was King of Judæa at that time was in a great fright. He was afraid that his kingdom would be taken from him by this new King, Jesus. Foolish man! he need not have feared, for, in the course of nature, he would have died before the child would be old enough to claim the kingdom. Besides, the kingdom

of Jesus "is not of this world." However, he was determined to make sure of his throne by killing the Infant King ; but he was too cunning to tell the wise men this. He pretended that he wanted to know where He was, that he might come and worship Him also. So he begged the wise men to be sure to come back and tell him when they had found the place where the young Child was. But the wise men were warned by God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, and they went back to their own country by another way. Then Herod was very angry, and resolved that the little King should not escape him. So to make sure, he formed the cruel design of killing all the young children under two years old in Bethlehem and the neighbourhood. But God, who knows the hearts of men, and will not let wicked people do all that they mean to do, sent an angel to tell Joseph to take the young Child and His mother and flee into Egypt, out of the way. Of course Herod did not know this, and he sent his soldiers to

kill all the poor little babes. So they went into all the houses and cottages, and snatched the babies from their mothers' arms, or caught them up out of their cradles, and stabbed them with their swords, or cut their poor little throats, without any pity for them or their heart-broken mothers. Oh what a sad sight that must have been! the poor mothers crying and sobbing over the mangled bodies of their darlings, and the little brothers and sisters, frightened nearly to death by the fierce soldiers, and the streaming blood, and mingling their cries and screams with their mothers' lamentations. And there lay the dear little babies, the pet ones of the family, some of whom had been just beginning to talk, some just able to toddle across the room, some only lately born; and now the innocent prattling tongues are hushed for ever, the little merry eyes closed in death, the tiny limbs hacked and smeared with blood! Oh! it was a sad scene! sad on earth at least, but there is another and brighter side to the picture. Ah, if those

weeping mothers could but have seen the angels bearing the souls of their little ones to Paradise, and heard their glad songs of joy that so many yet undefiled by sin were "redeemed from the earth as the firstfruits unto God and the Lamb,"—if they could have seen the wonder and delight of those innocent babes at all they saw in that new world, if they could have heard their little spirit-voices learning to sing that new song which the angels were teaching them,—if they could have heard and seen all this, would they not have smiled through their tears, and been comforted when they saw how happy their darlings really were? Would they not have thanked God, Who had put such honour on their babes and chosen them out of all the infants in the world to be before His throne, the first martyrs for the Infant Jesus? But the poor mothers did not see all this, they only saw the empty cradles and little limbs stiff in death, and thought of their desolate homes, and the screams of their murdered babes were still ringing

in their ears, and they "refused to be comforted because they were not."

And you, dear children, would you not like to go where those babes went? would you not like the angels to carry you to Paradise when you die? do you not hope that you may be among that happy band of virgin souls who follow in the train of the Lamb of God? Well, if so, you must "keep innocency and take heed unto the thing that is right," (*Psalm xxxvii.* 38. P. Bk.) You must be martyrs, that is, "witnesses" for Jesus. You must "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth."

Those little babes were innocent and pure and unstained by sin. Baptized in their own blood, they were called away "'ere sin could blight or sorrow fade" by Him Who though a Babe on earth was still even then "the Mighty God" in Heaven: called away "from the miseries of this sinful world" by Him Who said "suffer the little children to come unto Me and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of Heaven." And you, dear

children, watch and pray that you may keep the innocency and purity of early childhood "unspotted from the world." May you ever be innocent as new-born babes from thought of evil. And if you are not called away, like the innocents of Bethlehem, in early childhood, may you keep through all your lives child-like hearts, and be as little children to the end in simple faith and love and purity! "In their mouth was found no guile," and may God keep the door of your lips that you offend not with your tongues.

But how can you be *martyrs*? They were martyrs in one sense, because they were put to a cruel death for Jesus' sake. You are not likely to be called upon to be martyrs in this sense. But the word "martyr" means, as I said, a "witness." And you may be "His faint and faithful witnesses" in life. You may be witnesses to all around you of the power which Jesus has to draw to Himself the hearts of little children. You may witness to other children, aye, and to grown up people too, that even a little child can

follow Jesus. Those little martyred babes are now among those "who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth." And you may be of that number too, not only hereafter, but now, in this life; and if not in this life, you will not be hereafter.

Have you ever seen a flock of sheep following one with a bell round his neck? He is called the bell-wether, and where he goes, they all go too. So you, the little lambs of Christ's flock, must follow Him Who is not only the Good Shepherd to go *before* you; but also the Lamb to go *with* you. Follow Him, He will not lead you astray; but if you do not follow Him, you will be sure to go astray like lost sheep. Follow Him, He may lead you by a rough and narrow way sometimes, through some thorny thickets and tangled woods, over some rugged and sharp stones perhaps, up many a steep hill, and through wild forests with wolves and other wild beasts howling around you; but only trust Him and follow bravely where He leads, and keep close to Him, and He will guide

you safely through all dangers and over all difficulties to the green pastures and the still waters of Heaven. Follow Jesus whithersoever He goeth, and “fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” You cannot see Him, except by faith. The sheep and lambs, wandering over the hills and downs, cannot always see the bell-wether, sometimes the mountain mists hide him from their sight, sometimes there is a thicket or a hill between ; but they can always hear the bell and that tells them where he is. And so you can always *hear*, if you cannot *see*, which way you must go to follow Jesus. What the sound of the bell is to the mountain-sheep, the voice of Christ’s ministers is to you. You can learn from parents and teachers and pastors which way Jesus has gone, and which way He would have His lambs follow after Him. They will “teach you the good and the right way,” and if you are obedient to them, you will be following the Lamb of God. It is hard, I know ; hard to “keep innocency and take heed

unto the thing which is right," in a world which laughs at innocency and simplicity, and follows what seems pleasant rather than what is right: hard to be witnesses to Jesus and to confess Him before men in spite of ridicule and unkindness; hard to follow where Jesus leads, when other paths *look* so much more inviting and tempting; but Jesus leads nowhere but where He has gone Himself; and it would be the hardest and saddest thing of all, not to be allowed to follow Him in glory, because you would not follow Him in shame, not to be owned for His in the day when He maketh up His jewels, because you were too cowardly to confess Him as your Lord, not to be among His sheep, but among the goats, when He comes to gather His flock into the safe Fold of Heaven.

It is true that what He said to S. Peter, He may say to you now—"Whither I go thou canst not follow Me *now*," that is to Heaven—but if you follow Him now as far as you can, by imitating His holy life on earth, He will add to you as He went on to say

to S. Peter, "but thou shalt follow Me afterwards." And the joy of that "afterwards" will more than make up for the hardness of following Him now.

Then there will be no limit to that "whithersoever." "Whithersoever" the Lamb goeth, you shall follow Him. He will share all His joys with those who now share His sorrows. He will not lead His flock any longer by narrow and rough roads or thorny ways, there will be no steep hills to climb, no prowling beasts to fear. Peacefully they will feed with Him on the sweet herbage of the garden of the Lord ; all the joys of Heaven will be open to them. Free to wander where they will, they never more can go astray from Him, the beauty and gladness of Whose Presence will fill all that pleasant land. He will keep not from them whatsoever their eyes desire, nor withhold their heart from any joy. "No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there ; but the redeemed shall walk there : and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and

come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads : they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

And now let every little boy and girl who hears or reads this sermon and thinks how blessed it will be to follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth hereafter, try to think,—How can I begin *now* to follow Him more closely than I have yet done? and God give you grace to tread so faithfully in His footsteps here, that you may be numbered among His Holy Innocents hereafter.

"Thy Cross, O Lord, the holy sign
That we, hereafter, should be Thine,
Was traced upon our infant brow,
And shall we fear to own it now.

O God, forbid, before the vain,
The proud, the scoffing, the profane,
We will, through grace, our Lord confess,
His faint but faithful witnesses.

His strength in weakness He displays,
From youthful lips He perfects praise,
And we, His little soldiers, stand,
Strong in the might of His right hand.

Smile on us, Lord, and we will fear
Nor scorn, nor shame, whilst Thou art near;
Reproach is glory, suffering rest,
If borne for Thee, if by Thee blest.

Great Judge of all, in that dread day,
When Heaven and earth must pass away,
Before the universe confess
Thy faint but faithful witnesses. Amen.

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the 1990s, the number of people with a mental health problem has increased by 50% (Mental Health Foundation, 2000). The prevalence of mental health problems has increased in the general population, and the incidence of mental health problems has increased in the prison population.

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